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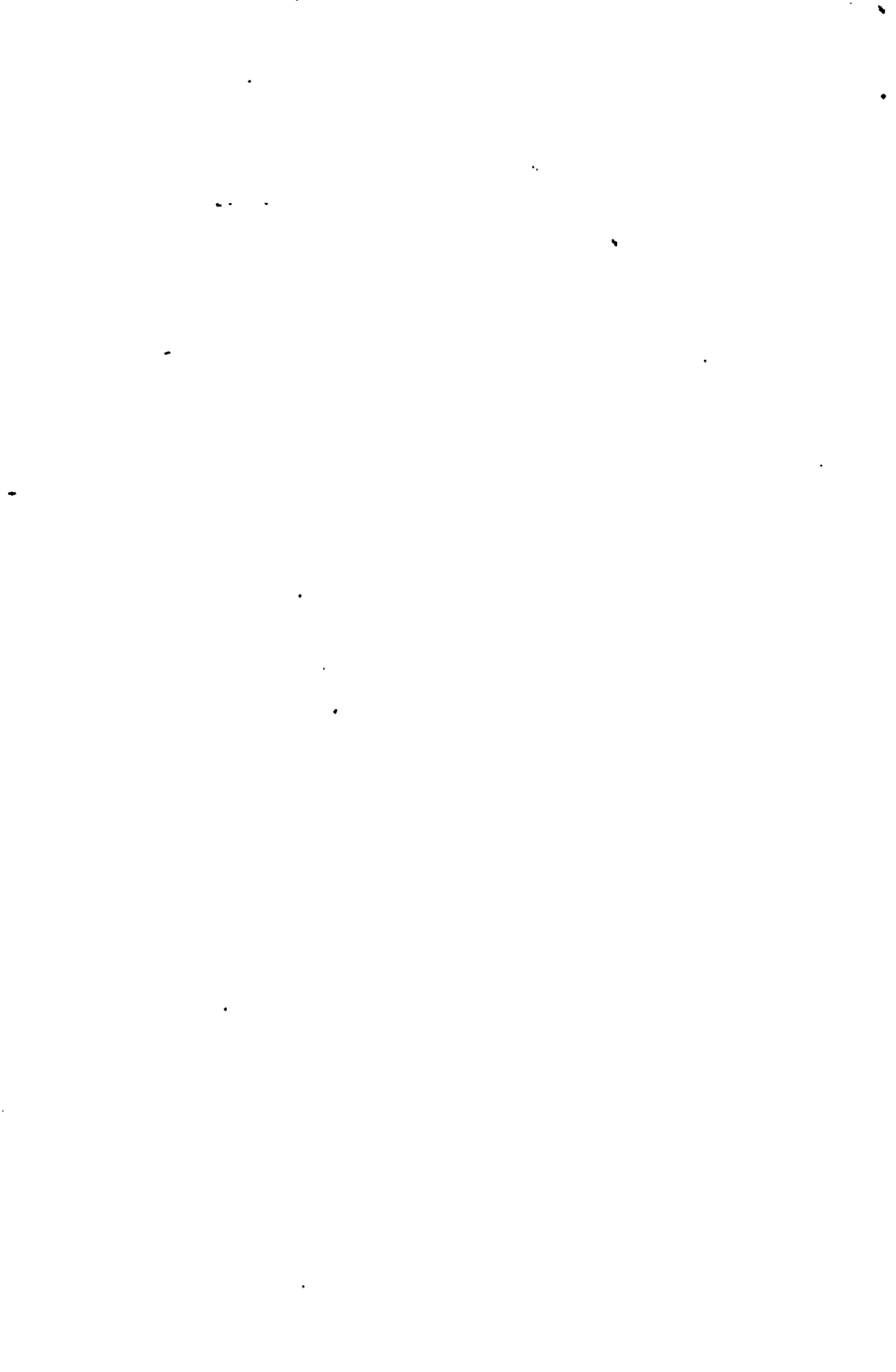


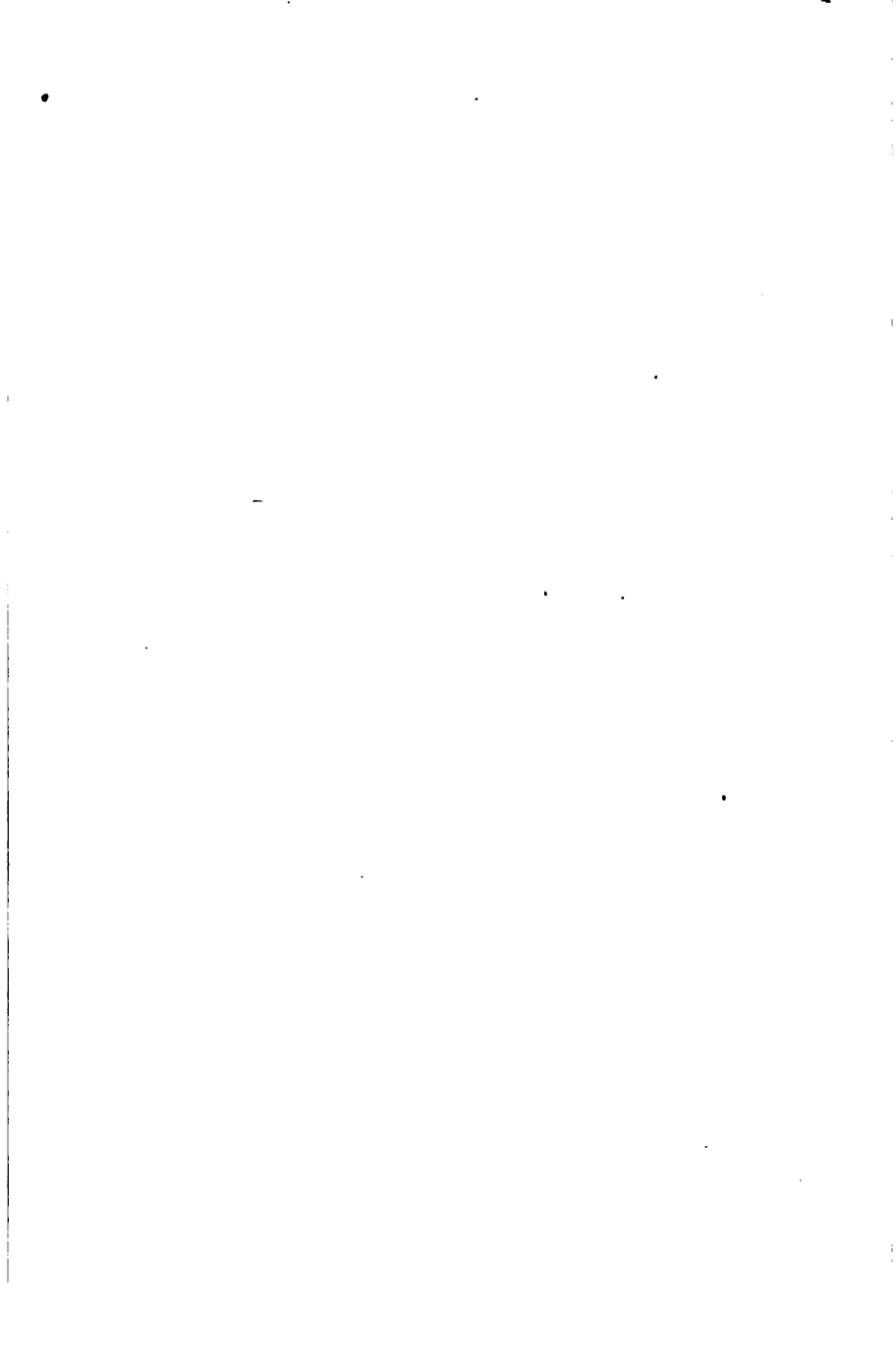
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**A DOUBLE  
THREAD .**



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# A·DOUBLE·THREAD

By·ELLEN·THORNEYCROFT·FOWLER

Author of "Concerning Isabel Carnaby," etc. . . .



*THIRTIETH THOUSAND*

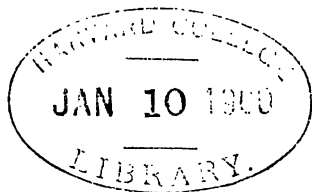
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## DEDICATION

**It, in the circle of my friends, there be  
One who will take this volume, writ by me,  
And not on all its imperfections look,  
But rather see the pathos and the wit  
Which I have tried, yet failed, to put in it—  
To her (or him) I dedicate my book.**



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# A Double Thread.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *THE BEAUTIFUL MISS HARLAND.*

“For you were poor, you will allow,  
And I was not, that dull December  
When first we met. I wonder now  
If you remember.”

“DON’T be so cynical, my dear Elfrida,” said Lady Silverhampton; “it is a fatal mistake for a woman not to believe in things.”

“But if I don’t believe in things, it is no use pretending that I do,” replied Miss Harland.

“Oh! yes it is, the greatest use in the world. Pretending that you’ve got a virtue is as good as having a virtue—at least so Shakespeare said, and he was supposed to be a very clever person.”

“Pardon me, dear lady, he didn’t quite say that,” corrected Lord Stonebridge.

“Well, if he didn’t he said something like it, which comes to the same thing. Don’t be accurate, Stonebridge; it is one unpardonable defect. If you don’t take care you will grow like the accurate witness who stated that ‘the prisoner he bar said, My dear Thomas, or words to that effect.’”

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"I should say inaccuracy, rather, is an unpardonable defect," Lord Stonebridge argued.

"Then you are quite out of it; accuracy is an unpardonable defect, and inaccuracy is an incurable disease. Therefore you should pity the latter while you blame the former. You are really very ignorant for a man of your age, Stonebridge!"

"I own the soft impeachment, and look to your ladyship to cure it."

"Oh! I'll cure it in time, but I can't attend to you now. I am curing Elfrida's faults at the present moment—don't you see?—and teaching her not to be cynical, but to believe in things. Why, if I'd ever had a daughter I'd have taught her to believe in everything, from popular preachers down to patent pills."

"She couldn't have done it," cried Lord Stonebridge; "believe me she couldn't have done it, if she'd had her mother's brains! The pills, perhaps, she might have swallowed; but the former part of the programme——!"

Lady Silverhampton nodded her head decidedly. "She would have had to do what I told her, as Silverhampton has."

Miss Harland laughed. "But you've never made Lord Silverhampton believe in things!"

"I've never tried; but if I had wished it, he'd have believed fast enough."

"It is never difficult to a man to believe in things," remarked Elfrida Harland; "they all begin by believing in themselves, and that presupposes no mean stock of credulity."

"But we are not all so proficient as to go on to the next step, which is believing in you," said Lord Stonebridge.

"A man who believes in himself only takes a pass degree," replied Elfrida; "but a man who tries to believe in a woman is reading for honours."

"And not for peace with honours," Lord Stonebridge added.

Lady Silverhampton looked critically at Elfrida as if she were measuring her for a new gown. "The best thing for you would be to fall in love," she said slowly; "hopelessly and horribly and irretrievably in love. That is the only cure I can see for this silly cynicism that is creeping upon you, and which, as I have told you, is fatal to any woman, especially to an unmarried one."

"That is what Arabella Seeley is always prescribing for me, but—though I am quite willing to try the cure—I find it impossible to begin. I seem to have no vocation for falling in love."

"Oh! it is quite easy, really. I fell in love with Silverhampton twenty years ago; and if a woman can fall in love with Silverhampton she can fall in love with anybody."

Miss Harland leaned back in her chair, and gazed lazily at her hostess through half-closed eyelids. "Tell us how you managed it; I should like to know."

"It was perfectly simple. I created a man in my own imagination, and dressed him up in all the qualities that I most admired, and called him Silverhampton. He wasn't in the least like the real Silverhampton, but I adored him."

Elfrida nodded approvingly. "That was very clever of you."

"It wasn't cleverness at all, it was feminine instinct: the same instinct which makes a little girl nurse a sofa cushion and rock it to sleep, don't you know? I'm not at all a clever person, but I'm simply bursting with feminine instinct; that is why I am such a success."

"And that is why, if you had had a daughter, you would have made her believe in things," Lord Stonebridge said.

"Exactly; and that is why I now insist on Elfrida's falling in love. It is the one thing lacking to complete her education."



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"Then begin at once, and I will do all in my power to be your assistant master," entreated his lordship, who, with Miss Harland, was staying from Friday until Monday at Grasslands, the Silverhamptons' country place.

It was a wet December afternoon. Lord Silverhampton had not yet returned from hunting, and the others had decided that it was pleasanter to talk indoors round the fire than to take exercise in the dripping woods or across the dreary and desolate park. It was disagreeable weather; but, as the hostess remarked, "Rain is always better than snow; because when rain is over it is over, while when snow is over it is only just beginning."

"The first thing in falling in love is to get a lay-figure on which to drape all the virtues you happen to fancy. I selected Silverhampton; but I daresay a score of other men would have done quite as well in the beginning, though I'm absolutely devoted to him now. How do you think Mr. Stracey would do for you?" asked Lady Silverhampton.

"My dear Evelyn, think of his collars!"

"Pooh! they'll take off."

"No, they won't. That is to say, the spirit which inspires a man to buy the wrong sort of collars, will go on inspiring him to do wrong things to the end of the chapter. You may change his haberdasher; but you cannot change his nature. A husband who committed crimes, I might love; but a husband who made mistakes, I should assuredly loathe."

"How about Captain Lunn?"

"He has a vile temper which he mistakes for a conscience, and a score of ignorant prejudices which he misnames principles. He also believes in homœopathy."

"Then there is Sir Philip Cay," persisted the indefatigable Lady Silverhampton.

"He tells the same story at least three times in one evening; and at least three times in one evening does he

leave out the point. No, my dearest friend, if you cannot find me something better than these whereon to set my youthful affections, I shall never catch a glimpse of Dan Cupid while the world stands. But, all the same, I should like to fall in love; I think it would amuse me, and so few things do."

"It is certainly amusing," interpolated Lord Stonebridge.

"It would entertain me extremely," continued Miss Harland in her soft drawl, "to feel my heart beat quickly and my face change colour at the appearance of one particular man. I assure you, I envy my own scullery-maid when I see her fly up the area-steps on a Sunday afternoon—her cheeks shining with happiness and yellow soap—to meet her young man at the end of the street. It must be delightful to care for a man so much that one would even wash one's face with yellow soap to please him!"

"It has its advantages," remarked Lady Silverhampton; "given that one has an adequate stock of yellow soap—or its equivalent. But to want to please a man, and not to be able to do so, must be positively sickening."

"I should never want to please a man that I couldn't please. I should call that a most unwomanly desire."

But Lady Silverhampton was not attending. She had a habit—when other people were speaking—of preparing her next remark, instead of listening to theirs.

"There is one thing that I would specially impress upon you," she said; "and that is never to pretend that you don't care for a man when you really do. Lots of girls make havoc of their lives in this way. They call it proper pride, I believe; and, as far as my experience goes, people with proper pride are as troublesome to deal with as people with delicate digestions. These always ask me if there is sugar in the salad, or pepper in the sauces, or some fad of that kind; as if I knew any better than they did! And people with proper pride are just as bad."

Lord Stonebridge nodded his approval. "A fool

pretends that he is not in love when he is; a wise man pretends that he is in love when he is not."

"That is true," remarked Elfrida; "and it is a good thing for a man to know the truth about himself."

"But it isn't a good thing to be the woman who tells it to him," added Lady Silverhampton.

"Doesn't your charming ladyship ever tell men the truth about themselves?" asked Lord Stonebridge.

"Never, unless I am in a temper; and then fortunately they think I am carried away by impulse, and don't mean what I say. But remember, my dear Elfrida, that if you want to be a successful woman you must always show your feelings and hide your opinions. That is my advice; and I've lived in this wicked and delightful world for over forty years, and know it well."

"Still, it is the instinct of English people to hide their feelings," said Lord Stonebridge.

"Yes; just as they hide their uniforms and ribands if they can. And great nonsense it all is!"

"Then you think we regard our hearts as decorations, and are ashamed of them accordingly?"

"Of course you do; and I've no patience with you. Now, if I had an Order I should invariably put it on for breakfast, I should be so proud of it. But Silverhampton is very English, and treats his as if it were a disgraceful family secret."

Lord Stonebridge smiled. "Then, according to your ladyship, Englishmen hide their feelings as carefully as they hide their stars?"

"Precisely; and Englishwomen hide theirs as carefully as they hide their garters. And I've no patience with either of them."

"By the way, is anybody else coming down to Grasslands for the Sunday?" asked Miss Harland.

"Yes; the Sunnydales and the Wyvilles and the Laceys,

all of whom you know by heart. And a man whom you haven't met, Captain Le Mesurier. Do you know, I am getting frightfully fond of Augusta Sunnydale, because she is just my age and looks ten years older?"

"How nice of her," Elfrida said; "it is things such as this which endear a woman to her fellows."

"Who is Captain Le Mesurier?" Lord Stonebridge asked. "Is he one of the Le Mesuriers of Greystone?"

"Yes; he is a nephew of Sir Roger, and a son of the brother who married that lovely Miss Stansfield ages ago, and then died. I am proud to say I cannot remember her. Jack is a dear boy; Silverhampton and I met him when we were in India two winters ago. He is in the Staff Corps, and hasn't been home for years; but now he is back on a twelve-months' furlough."

"Is he as good-looking as his father was?"

"I never saw his father; but Jack is one of the best-looking boys I ever met, and quite the nicest. There is the front-door bell, which means that Jack and the rest of the party have arrived. I sent to meet them at the four o'clock train."

Further conversation was prevented by the arrival of the party from town. Elfrida knew the others, as her hostess said, by heart; but she was interested to note that Captain Le Mesurier was a tall, handsome man, well under thirty, who carried himself well and wore the right sort of collars. So she decided not to snub him more than she could help.

Elfrida Harland was the granddaughter and sole heiress of an extinct Lord Chancellor. She had everything that fortune could give her, and consequently was weary of her life; which seems like a paradox but is really a platitude.

The late Lord Harland was the first and only peer. He had risen—*via* the Bar—from nothing to everything: nothing being represented by the prospects of a friendless law-student in his twenties; and everything by the most lucrative

practice at the Bar, and then the Great Seal in his sixties. The swarming of the social ladder George Harland had enjoyed immensely ; the seat at the top he had found so dull that he had eventually died of it, and had repaired to another world to begin the upward struggle over again, even more heavily handicapped than he was at the beginning of his earthly career. He had never been saintly in his best and youngest days ; and time and circumstances had combined to set his affections still more securely on things temporal. His success in this world had rendered him indifferent to the necessity of preparing for success in the next ; later, probably, he found out his mistake.

Lord Harland had devoted himself so exclusively to law that he had no time to spare for love or for religion ; so he compromised with the former by marrying a well-born and penniless young woman, who spent his money and sneered at his manners ; and with the latter by leaving five thousand pounds to the Church Missionary Society.

He had one child—a son—who unwisely fell in love with, and married, a beautiful actress, the daughter of a music-master ; and then died abroad, uncomforted by the parental forgiveness. The widow, poor soul ! declined to survive a husband whom she had adored, and expired at her father's house a few months afterwards, leaving twin daughters. Then Lord Harland behaved, as he thought, generously. He adopted one of the twins on condition that she should be cut off entirely from her sister and her mother's people, and never hold any further communication with them ; and when, nearly twenty years afterwards, he learnt, to his regret, that he was bound for a bourne whither it was impossible for his fortune to follow him, he left the whole of the same to this granddaughter, only excepting that five thousand pounds which he had reserved as a sop—not for Cerberus—but for whosoever fulfils the duties of Cerberus in Another Place.

Lady Harland predeceased her husband by two years : she died from the combined effects of *ennui* and luxury. Neither alone would have been sufficient to kill her, but she could not stand against the allied forces. However, she lived long enough to teach her granddaughter all the things she considered it necessary for a well-bred woman to know ; namely, the table of precedence, the way to put her clothes on, and the art of talking charmingly without saying anything.

Elfrida lost her grandmother when she was nineteen and her grandfather when she was twenty-one. Then she found herself one of the richest and handsomest woman in London, with the power and the means to do whatsoever took her fancy. Nevertheless she was not happy. She had much admiration and little love—which diet is to the human soul what much stimulant and little food is to the human body. She had also drunk deeply of the spirit of her grandparents' cynicism, and had learnt from them not to put much faith in her fellow-creatures. In fact she did not believe that there is such a thing as disinterested affection ; she knew that her face attracted some men and her fortune others, and she nourished a supreme scorn for all attachments thus inspired.

To the outward eye she was almost perfection. She was neither tall nor short, but a comfortable "three-quarter size," which made women look short and men tall beside her. Her hair was golden, shaded with brown ; and her eyes were the colour of wild hyacinths. She was essentially what women call "satisfactory"—that is to say, she was faultlessly fashionable and scrupulously neat, and had the indefinable air of being dressed by a first-class maid and of doing nothing for herself. Perhaps to a man's eye she was almost too finished, too artificial—her hair was so elaborately curled and her waist so abnormally tiny ; but no woman ever found fault with another on this score.

The beautiful Miss Harland lived in the house which her grandfather had occupied in Mayfair, and she paid Arabella Seeley a handsome salary to keep her company and act as her *chaperone*. Arabella was a widow of unknown age, who made up for her lack of youth by extreme archness. She was a kind-hearted little woman, and would have been really nice if only she had allowed herself to grow up; but girlishness, when it becomes chronic, is an irritating malady. She was the type of person who would sit on the floor rather than on a chair, and who administered to her friends playful little slaps out of sheer light-heartedness. She suffered from a sentimental affliction which she called "heart-hunger," and which, she said, no one but her husband had ever satisfactorily appeased; forgetting that the late Mr. Seeley had failed to deal so satisfactorily with hunger of a more ordinary kind. But Arabella was one of the women who retain only the rose-coloured rays of life; she remembered that her beloved Albert had been tall and fair and good-looking, but she never recalled that he had been idle and selfish and extravagant, and had wasted the whole of her small patrimony and left her penniless.

"Are you fond of the country?" asked Elfrida of Captain Le Mesurier in the drawing-room after dinner.

"I am fond of everything just at present; it is all so new—and so old—after seven years in India. I feel I want a sort of concentrated essence of England before I can get enough of it."

"Then everything is a treat to you, I suppose, even including Shakespeare at the Lyceum and a Sunday in the country?"

"Rather!"

Elfrida sighed. "I am just the opposite of all that. I have been living on concentrated essence of England for the last seven years, and the consequence is that nothing is a treat to me."

“I am an old-fashioned man, I admit; and I still regard pleasure as a recreation rather than a profession.”

“How nice! I wish I were old-fashioned too; but unfortunately I am so modern that I consider the art of enjoying oneself is as much a lost art as that of staining glass or building cathedrals. It has been superseded by the science of amusing oneself, which is by no means the same thing.”

Captain Le Mesurier looked sympathetic. “That is a bore for you. It is horrid not to enjoy things!”

“But so few things are worth enjoying. Take an afternoon party, for instance: who ever enjoyed an afternoon party? I even go so far as to suggest that afternoon parties should be administered only under chloroform. Surely a Government which will not allow frogs and rabbits to be vivisected without an anæsthetic, ought to insist upon this mitigation of human misery.”

“Well, afternoon parties are a little slow,” admitted Jack reluctantly; “especially when you are a man and have to cart the food about.”

“Then take a dinner party. It bores you to go, and it bores your hostess still more to ask you. Wherein, may I ask, does the enjoyment consist?”

Captain Le Mesurier tugged at his moustache. “Oh! I think you are wrong there—I do indeed. One may have a pretty girl to take in; and, if not, there is always the dinner.”

“But how about the pretty girl? Perhaps she may be the one who is bored.”

Jack was silent for a moment, and then smiled. He had a pleasant smile, the sort of smile that makes women think that other women don't understand a man. “No, she isn't bored. I can answer for that.”

Elfrida smiled too. “You have plenty of self-confidence.”

“No, I haven't, really; but I know what I can do and



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what I can't. Talking to a woman and sticking on to a horse are the one, and everything else is the other."

"Don't you mind if the woman and the horse have tempers?"

"I prefer it. The more difficult they are to manage the more I enjoy myself."

"I don't know about a horse; but certainly the breaking-in of a bad-tempered woman seems to me to entail far more trouble than it is worth," remarked Elfrida with her most *blasé* air.

"You might say the same of elephant-hunting or of tiger-shooting."

"Well, and what should you say?"

Jack laughed. "I should say that you hadn't tried them, or else you wouldn't talk such nonsense, Miss Harland."

At that moment Lady Silverhampton came up and joined them. "You can't play or sing or anything, can you, Captain Le Mesurier? Because, if you can, I shall have to ask you to do so."

"No; I cannot perform any parlour tricks, I regret to say."

"What a comfort!" exclaimed his hostess, sinking on to a sofa. "I can't bear having people here who can do things; because then they are always wanting to do them, and that is so tiresome for everybody else. Besides, I think it is so commonplace to be accomplished, don't you? From a society point of view it is better to murder one's mother-in-law than to play the piano after dinner."

"And much better sport, I should fancy," added Jack.

"You would have said so if you had known the Dowager Lady Silverhampton in the days of her flesh. If I hadn't had the temper of an angel, that old woman would never have died peacefully in her bed. You can't think what a trial she was to me. She seemed to think that I had somehow poached on her preserves by marrying her son; which was

absurd, because she couldn't possibly have married him herself, you know."

"How tiresome of her!" said Elfrida. "I don't think I could ever get on with a mother-in-law, so I have made up my mind to have none, but to be an orphan-in-law."

"But sisters-in-law are a million times worse, because it takes a woman of one's own age to find one out. I really wouldn't have married Silverhampton if he'd had sisters, because they'd have seen through all my little dodges, which the Dowager, I am thankful to say, never did. And, then, think of a woman with Silverhampton's nose! She would have been unbearable. Oh! I am very thankful that he never had any sisters."

"But it must be nice to have a sister of one's own," remarked Jack.

"It is; no household should be without one. Sisters and brothers are the only people who can tell the truth to each other without making enemies, and they are the only friends who can exist without flattery."

"If I had a husband I shouldn't flatter him," said Elfrida.

"Then, my dear, he'd beat you, and with my full approval. A woman who won't flatter is like a piano that won't play. It may be an imposing piece of furniture, but it isn't a piano. Now, take Sophia Lumley; she prides herself—positively prides herself—on never saying pretty things to people. She might just as well pride herself—as so many people seem to do—on not being able to take cream, or exercise. Why on earth should people pride themselves on their infirmities? They ought rather to be ashamed of them, I should say. Yet I've seen people bridle with conceit when they said they must have milk and not cream in their tea. Haven't you?"

"Often," agreed Elfrida; "as if it were a sign of excessive refinement."

"I know; and they are just as proud of not being able to

say nice things as they are of not being able to take nice things, and where the virtue of it all lies, goodness only knows! What there is to be proud of in being spiteful and bilious I cannot imagine; but these qualities seem to inflate their possessors. Only the other day Sophia Lumley went out of her way to tell me that I looked quite my age; and seemed as pleased with herself for doing so as if she had just said grace instead of insulting me."

"How exactly like her," said Elfrida sympathetically. "She told me the other day that if I heard what people said of me behind my back—instead of only what they said before my face—I should find out that I had fewer friends than I imagined."

"What a disagreeable person Sophia Lumley must be!" exclaimed Jack.

"But the sickening part of it is," his hostess continued, "that she counts all this to herself for righteousness, and positively pats and strokes her conscience the whole time. If she only knew how horrid she is, I could bear it; but when she mistakes her vileness for virtue it makes me feel positively ill."

"I wonder how old she is herself?" Elfrida remarked. "She must be at least forty."

"And the rest," cried Lady Silverhampton. "The other day she told me with pride that somebody had guessed her age to be thirty-nine; and things are pretty bad with a woman when she is flattered at being taken for thirty-nine."

Captain Le Mesurier smiled. "Then she is old enough to know better than to go on in this way."

"Oh! she'll never know any better, not when she is ninety-nine. She is regularly disagreeable, and always will be. I'd rather play the piano than behave as Sophia Lumley does, for I think it is even better to be accomplished than to be spiteful."

"I wouldn't go as far as that," said Elfrida cautiously.

"I would. Why, my dear, I would sooner sing hymns to a concertina than say nasty things to people ; it would make one less unpopular in the long run."

"How about saying nasty things *of* people?" suggested Jack.

"Oh ! that's quite different. As long as people are civil to me to my face, I don't care what they say behind my back ; our faces are our own but our backs are our neighbours'. We are all like cottages with neat little gardens in front and dirty linen hanging out to dry in the back-yard ; and it is our own fault if we poke our heads out of our back windows and hear what our neighbours are saying about us there."

"But people, such as Miss Lumley, appear to open your back windows for you," Jack said.

"That is where they are so tiresome and impertinent. Who on earth wants to know the truth about themselves ? I don't, and I never met anybody who did. So why this compulsory education 'should be forced upon us is more than I can say. What we want is a muzzling-order for all sincere and truth-speaking persons ; that would make the world a much better and happier place."

And Jack and Elfrida agreed with their hostess.

During the Sunday these two talked a great deal to one another, though Captain Le Mesurier felt a distinct irritation all the time he was doing so. Elfrida was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen ; the type of woman, he thought, that might be worshipped for her beauty, and it annoyed him to hear her talk in the sneering and cynical manner she generally adopted. Jack hated sarcastic women, and he felt that Fate had served him a shabby trick in realizing for him his ideal of beauty, and spoiling the same by the addition of a sharp tongue. A regular hot temper he liked, but the cool bitterness of a seasoned woman of the world was not in his line at all, and it vexed him more than

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he would have cared to confess to find that the beautiful Miss Harland was made after this pattern. He did not take into consideration the fact that it is bad for a woman to be run after according to her fortune, and that one who has known much of this sort of thing is apt to become more cynical than it is seemly for a woman to be. Those for whom the prayer of Agur is answered do not see the worst side of human nature; this depressing view is reserved for the extremely rich and the extremely poor—for those, in fact, in whose lives money, or the want of it, is the prevailing characteristic.

As for Elfrida, she liked Jack better than any man she had ever met before, he was so simple and manly and straightforward, and never seemed to be thinking about her fortune at all. She even went so far as to admit to herself that there might be excuses, under certain circumstances, for washing one's face with yellow soap on a Sunday afternoon—or for putting on one's best gown and diamonds for a small dinner party with no ball afterwards, which is practically the same thing.

## CHAPTER II.

### *THE WELFORDS.*

“ ‘Preserve me from the commonplace,’ I cried,  
‘Nor let me walk the vulgar people’s way ;  
I long to tread a loftier path than they  
Who eat and drink, and think of nought beside ! ’ ”

**M**R. WELFORD was what is called a self-made man ; and it is but fair to say that the finished article did credit to its manufacturer. There was no humbug about him, and he possessed an abundance of common sense, while his kindness of heart was inexhaustible.

As a wife, Mrs. Welford was unexceptionable ; as a woman, most uninteresting. James Welford’s earliest ambition had been to marry one of the Miss Snapes of Trawley ; but it would have seemed to him invidious—not to say impertinent—to have picked out one of the sisters specially. He would as soon have thought of saying which lump of sugar he would take at tea, or which mutton chop at dinner. It was enough to state that one would take sugar in one’s tea, or dine off a mutton chop—further fastidiousness was quite out of place. All the Miss Snapes were equally fair and buxom and well-dowered ; and so James Welford was quite content when Jane was allotted to him. He would have been equally pleased—though not more so—had it been Emma or Maria, or Mary Ann.

The Welfords had two children, Percy and Julia. In the case of Percy Welford, priggishness was cultivated into a

science. He was the type of young man who considers himself equal to teach anybody anything, and—had the occasion been granted to him—he would willingly have instructed Milton in sonnet-writing and Michael Angelo in the fine arts. If he read anything that he failed to understand (which was not infrequently), he said it was not English; and he condemned as vulgar all forms of success (and they were not few) to which he had failed to attain. Moreover, he took himself seriously, and had no sense of humour; and if other people's opinions were different from his, he said that they grated upon him.

Nevertheless Percy had his good points. He was devoted to his mother, and he kept a conscience. This conscience he treated very much as small children treat their nurses; that is to say, he cried "Bo!" to it, and tried to frighten it with bogies, and pretended to shock it out of its wits; but, all the same, he would no more have dared seriously to disobey it than he would have tried to fly.

Julia Welford was of an opposite type to her brother; she was less conceited and therefore more unhappy. She was one of the unlucky women whose outer seeming and inner feelings do not match each other; and she had an intense craving for affection, without any corresponding power to command the same. She was a handsome girl, and ought to have been attractive; but unfortunately she was utterly lacking in that indefinable quality which men call charm, so her undeniable good looks did not count. Julia Welford expected too much of everybody and everything; therefore disappointment was her inalienable portion. She was always overdrawing her account at the bank of life, and consequently having her cheques dishonoured. She had never grasped the fact that the measure wherewith we mete is the only measure which we have a right to demand; and that as we can only give of our very best to one person, we should expect only one person to

give of his or her very best to us. Poor Julia, however, expected to be first in the estimation of people who occupied about the twenty-fifth place in her scale of attachment; and when she found that she was naturally not the primary consideration in these cases, she cried her eyes out, and exclaimed that love was a snare and friendship vanity. She had no sense of proportion.

The Welfords' house was large and ugly and comfortable, and was called Fairlawn. It was situated on the outskirts of the pretty little village of Sunnydale; and Mr. Welford and Percy went every day by train to the neighbouring town of Trawley to attend to their business.

One day, about a week after Christmas, Percy inquired of his family, who were assembled round the tea-table:

"Has any one seen anything of the new organist who has come to Sunnydale in old Lester's place?"

"I have seen him, my dear," replied Mrs. Welford; "he is quite an old man, and stoops dreadfully, but Mrs. Bailey tells me he is a pleasant person to talk to."

"Did Mrs. Bailey give you any further information about him or his family?" Percy inquired.

"Yes; she told me all about them," replied Percy's mother, settling herself down comfortably to the recital of such news as she had gleaned. Mrs. Welford dearly loved to talk; it was her one recreation, and she never lost an opportunity of indulging in it. The strange thing was that doing it so much did not teach her to do it better—in short, that such continual practice did not come within measurable distance of some sort of conversational perfection. The excellent lady possessed the gift of making supremely uninteresting every subject that she chose to touch; the most thrilling information became tame and spiritless in Mrs. Welford's hands. And this arose partly from the fact that in telling a story she was incapable of separating the grain from the chaff, and leaving out the non-



essential portions of the history; and partly from a habit she affected of repeating conversations exactly as they took place, instead of using the form which grammarians call "the oblique oration."

"I met Mrs. Bailey about a fortnight ago," she began; "but no—I think it must be three weeks, because I distinctly remember that there was no snow on the ground, as I should not have stood still in the road to speak to anybody if there had been; and I am sure this snow has been lying over a fortnight already."

"It fell exactly a fortnight to-day," snapped out Julia; "but what has that to do with the new organist and his family?"

"Nothing, my dear, nothing; but I was just wondering how long it was since Mrs. Bailey spoke to me about them. If, as you say, it is a full fortnight since the snow fell, it must be nearly three weeks since the day I stopped to talk to Mrs. Bailey in the road. It was a wonderfully warm day for the time of year, as we stood talking for at least five minutes—or it might have been ten—without feeling chilled in the very least."

"Well, continue about Mr. Morgan," interrupted Percy.

"As I was saying, Mrs. Bailey said to me, 'Mrs. Welford, have you called upon our new organist yet?' 'No, Mrs. Bailey,' I said, 'I have not done so, it being such a busy time just now preparing for Christmas; and I always make a point of seeing to the plum-puddings and the spiced beef and the mince-pies myself, as, if you leave them to servants, there is sure to be some mistake; either the beef is not spicy enough, or the mince-meat tastes of suet. 'You are quite right, Mrs. Welford,' replied Mrs. Bailey; 'if you want a thing well done do it yourself, and don't leave it to anybody.' She is really a most sensible woman."

Percy made another attempt to lead his wandering parent into the conversational paths where he wished her to walk.

"But what about the Morgans, mother?"

"I was just telling you about them, my love, if you had not interrupted me. 'Mr. Morgan is an interesting old man,' continued Mrs. Bailey, 'and an accomplished musician; and his wife is an excellent woman in her way, though her tongue is too sharp for my taste.' 'Mrs. Bailey,' I said, 'that is a pity; the wife of a professional man should never have a sharp tongue. It may do harm to her husband, and can do herself no good.'"

"Did Mrs. Bailey tell you anything else about them?" asked the insatiable Percy.

"Yes, a great deal, which I will repeat to you if you will only give me time," replied his mother. "It appears that the Morgans have a granddaughter living with them—an extremely handsome girl; at least she doesn't exactly live with them, as she has a situation, I believe, as a governess or companion or something, and makes their very small income a little larger by her salary; but she spends her holidays with them, and she is at home now."

"I have seen her," exclaimed Percy; "she is a 'phantom of delight.'"

"Right you are," agreed his father; "I think she is one of the best-looking girls I ever saw in my life."

"She is vilely dressed," remarked Julia; "she wears ready-made clothes, and does her hair in an obsolete fashion. I don't admire her at all."

"You never do admire other girls," said her brother pleasantly; "you are so consumedly jealous."

Julia's face flushed and her eyes filled with tears. She was always laying herself open to nasty knocks, and then crying when the inevitable occurred.

"I am not jealous," she retorted angrily. "How could I be jealous of a girl who dresses badly and can't even do her own hair properly? Besides, she has got such horrid manners, and has all the assurance and assertiveness of a

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woman who is earning her own living. She seems to me a detestable sort of girl."

"Never mind, Judy," said her father kindly; "there is room in the world for two handsome women, you know, and lovers enough for both and to spare. So you need not grudge the organist's granddaughter her good looks, for you have your full share yourself, my dear."

Mr. Welford was a very pleasant man in all things save matters ecclesiastical. He was so thoroughly pleased with himself that he looked at life through rose-coloured spectacles. Consequently the people who lived with him loved him; while those who only met him occasionally laughed at him a great deal.

"Where have you seen Miss Morgan?" Percy inquired of his sister.

"Her name isn't Morgan, it is Harland," answered Julia. "Her mother was Mr. Morgan's daughter, and died when she was a baby. She (the mother, I mean) had married very much above her, and her husband's people never would recognize her, as it was a runaway match."

"Then where is the husband now?" asked Percy.

"Oh! he died abroad, after he had been married a few months, and the widow did not long survive him. She left twin daughters, born after their father's death; and her parents adopted the one, while his people took the other on condition that the latter had nothing to do with her mother's relations."

"It is rather rough on this one," said Mr. Welford, "for her twin sister to be living in luxury while she has to work for her own living."

Percy agreed with his father. "Extremely rough, I should say."

"But with such a face as hers she won't have to work long," added the master of Fairlawn.

Julia tossed her head. "At any rate she has had to work

in single blessedness till she is five-and-twenty, so she cannot be so marvellously attractive after all."

"Let not the pot address the kettle," retorted her brother. "If my arithmetic is not at fault, you yourself are six-and-twenty."

"Oh! *I* don't set up for being a beauty."

"It is a good thing you do not, for you would get no following if you did."

"Gently, children, gently," remonstrated Mr. Welford. Then he turned to his wife. "I think you should call on the Morgans when you have the leisure, my dear."

"I mean to do so. I said only the other day to Mrs. Bailey, 'Mrs. Bailey, I think that in a small village such as this it is everybody's duty to call upon everybody else. In a large town one may pick and choose one's friends; but in a small village one must be neighbourly.' And Mrs. Bailey quite agreed with me."

As a matter of fact, the vicar's wife had originated the sentiment, and Mrs. Welford had agreed with her. But this was a mere question of detail.

"And after you have called you should invite them to something," continued the hospitable manufacturer; "a good dinner is a great treat to people like that. They don't get one every day."

"I shouldn't waste a dinner on them," said Julia; "I should give an evening party to all the people we don't care about, and throw them in."

"But a dinner would do them good," persisted Mr. Welford.

"Yes, a dinner is the correct thing," agreed Percy, who foresaw that if he took Miss Harland in to dinner he should have far more conversation with her than he should at an evening party.

"You couldn't ask anybody decent to meet them," argued Julia; "and it would be a dreadful bore to have them all to

ourselves. People like that are smuggled in with a crowd at an evening party ; but one always feels responsible somehow for the people one invites to dinner."

"You could ask the vicarage people to meet them," suggested Percy.

His sister shook her head vehemently. "I wouldn't do such a thing for worlds. Mrs. Bailey is a perfect lady—she is first cousin to a baronet, and her father was a gentleman at large—so I would not take a liberty with her on any account. She would very much resent being asked to meet such people as the Morgans."

"I don't see why," said Mr. Welford, looking puzzled.

"Oh! I call the Morgans awfully common: they live in a poky little house, and only keep one servant, and are altogether outsiders. As for the girl, she is thoroughly bad style in my opinion; and I feel sure she hasn't a proper evening dress in her possession. I expect she would come in a Sunday dress, with a white camellia in her hair and a bit of maiden-hair fern, and think she was all right."

"She would be 'a lovely apparition' in anything," said Percy.

"I don't agree with you."

Mr. Welford again stepped into the breach. "Anyway, your mother shall call on them at once, as it is well to be on a friendly footing with all one's neighbours; and we can settle about inviting them afterwards."

"Still, we must ask them soon," objected Percy, "or else Miss Harland's holidays will be over. Governesses don't generally get more than a month at Christmas."

The result of this conversation was that the very next day Mrs. Welford and her daughter went to pay their call on the organist's wife.

Julia was right when she called the Morgans' house "poky." The architect had been clever in that—though the house was situated in one of the prettiest villages in

England—there was not a view to be obtained from any of the windows; though the prospect from the garden was most beautiful and extensive, and included peeps of half a dozen counties. Nevertheless the little dwelling was warm and comfortable; and, thanks to the substantial help which they received from their granddaughter, there was no sign of poverty in the Morgans' home. If they had not had her to help them, poor old Mr. Morgan and his wife would have fared but badly; but she was a good girl, and saw that, as far as it lay in her power to prevent it, her grandparents did not want for anything.

Mrs. Morgan was a neat little old lady, with a face like a hard apple. Life had not been easy to her, but she had proved herself equal to all its demands, though the struggle had left her somewhat untender.

As for her granddaughter—but it is difficult to describe Ethel Harland. It is simple enough to say that she was beautiful and clever; so are scores of women; but it is impossible to adequately depict the precise combination of qualities which made Ethel such an attractive woman.

Her features and height and colouring were exactly the same as Elfrida's; but there the resemblance ended, as far as an ordinary observer could see. Instead of having Elfrida's air of finish and fashion, she was plainly, even poorly, dressed; in place of Elfrida's elaborately arranged coiffure, Ethel's hair was done up anyhow, in an old-fashioned style, and was, moreover, decidedly untidy. Unlike Elfrida's stately and studied manner, Ethel was perfectly natural and spontaneous; and, in short, Ethel seemed a light-hearted child of nature, while Elfrida appeared to be a spoilt darling of fortune.

Mrs. Morgan and her granddaughter were sitting in their little parlour, sewing, when their visitors were announced.

"I hope you will excuse me for not having called upon you earlier," began Mrs. Welford, bustling and rustling into

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the room till she seemed to fill it ; “ but, as I said to Mrs. Bailey only the other day, ‘ One is so busy just at Christmas time that one really has no time to attend to one’s social duties, and so they get terribly neglected.’ And Mrs. Bailey quite agreed with me.”

Mrs. Welford always offered an apology whenever she could find a reasonable excuse for one ; not that she was ever really penitent about anything she had done or left undone—she was far too easy-going for that—but she had an idea that it was good manners to do so. Whence she had got this idea into her head, it is impossible to say ; but, as every one knows, incorrect ideas are the ideas that stick.

“ Pray do not apologize, Mrs. Welford,” said Mrs. Morgan sharply ; “ better late than never, you know ; and it is kind of you to come at all.”

“ And this I suppose is Miss Harland,” remarked the visitor, extending a plump, well-gloved hand to Ethel ; “ Julia, my love, let me introduce you to this dear young lady. I am sure in so small a place as this all the young people should make friends with each other ; don’t you think so, Mrs. Morgan ? As I was saying to my husband only yesterday, ‘ James,’ said I, ‘ we old folks can do without new friends, but the young ones need congenial companionship.’ You see, the young people have not the resources in themselves that we have.”

“ I do not agree with you there,” replied Mrs. Morgan ; “ it seems to me that they have far more resources than we have, and far more opportunities of enlarging those resources.”

Mrs. Morgan nearly always contradicted a statement. She had been very poor until her granddaughter was of an age to help her, and in her case poverty had run to contradictiousness. It sometimes does ; just as wealth runs to selfishness now and then.

"I hope Mr. Morgan is well," said Mrs. Welford; "he must find this cold weather very trying when he has to go out through the snow to all the services. As we drove here to-day I remarked to my daughter, 'Julia, there is nothing so trying and so likely to give one cold as a deep snow—except a thick fog; it is so difficult to keep one's feet dry in snowy weather.'"

"Do you think so? Now my husband is of quite a different opinion—he says this cold weather is ten times more healthy than the warm muggy days which preceded it, and so he feels much stronger and more fit for work than he did then."

"I can quite understand that," said Mrs. Welford, in a conciliatory manner; "and Sunnysdale is a particularly bracing place. The vicar and his wife lived at Sugbury before they came here, and they find this such a delightful change after that relaxing climate. They had only been here a few months when Mrs. Bailey said to me, 'Mrs. Welford, you will hardly believe it, but my husband and I feel ten years younger than we did at Sugbury.' And I was so glad to hear it, for the Baileys are such charming people. He is an excellent preacher, you know, though rather too high for my taste; and she has most aristocratic connections."

"I don't know what you mean by being 'too high,' Mrs. Welford: I must confess that I like an ornate ritual myself."

Mrs. Morgan had not the least intention of being disagreeable when she disagreed with people; it was her way of enjoying herself.

"Of course, dear Mrs. Morgan," her visitor hastened to assure her; "so do I—in fact, I believe all women do; but one has to consider one's husband. Our late vicar was extremely ritualistic, and I must confess that I enjoyed his services extremely. But I had a terrible time with Mr.



Welford. We dine early on Sundays—on account of the servants, you know—and he used to be so put out by the way in which the morning service was conducted that he never could digest his dinner. In fact, he was positively ill all Sunday evening and Monday morning, as regular as clockwork, till I was afraid his digestion would be permanently impaired by Mr. Rigby's ritualism."

"Ah! it is a mistake to take things to heart like that—a great mistake! How did you deal with the matter?"

"It got so bad at last," continued Mrs. Welford, "that—after we'd had a processional hymn—he could not digest a mutton chop and a plain rice pudding. So I said, 'James, you will break down if you go on like this; let us take a pew at the Congregational Chapel.'"

Mrs. Morgan shook her head. "You were wrong there, Mrs. Welford; you had better have joined the Wesleyans. Their services are almost identical with those of the Church of England, and so are their doctrines, I believe."

Mrs. Welford hastened to appease her hostess by saying that the Wesleyan Chapel was too far off.

"Did the plan answer?" inquired Mrs. Morgan, with sincere interest.

Mrs. Welford shook her head. "Just at first it answered splendidly, and James's digestion got back to its ordinary state; but one Sunday they had a collection for the choir-expenses—with an anthem—and James declared that an anthem was flat Popery, and that he would never go near the place again. I remember we unfortunately had veal for dinner that Sunday, and I thought that at tea-time James would have died."

While their female relations were discussing theological difficulties, Julia and Ethel catechized each other, as girls will; that is to say, Julia asked questions in order to find out what Ethel was like, and Ethel found out what Julia was like without asking any questions at all.

"Do you think Sunnydale is a pretty village?" inquired Julia, with her most patronizing air.

"Quite lovely. Everything is perfect of its kind, and everything is in its right position. The river runs just where it ought to run, and the church is planted just where the church ought to be, and even the post-office knows its place and sticks to it."

Julia's manner chilled visibly; she did not like to be spoken to by a governess in this easy and familiar way. Unlike the post-office, Miss Harland evidently did not know her place.

"This is your first visit here, I believe," said Julia stiffly.

"Yes; I only come home for my holidays, and my grand-parents moved here during the autumn, while I was hard at work, in order to be comfortably settled when I was ready to come to them. I do so love the country, and yet I have so little of it; but now I spend every spare moment out of doors, so as to make the very most of this delightful place. It must be nice for you, living here all the year round!"

"I get very tired of it. One cannot feed one's mind entirely upon fresh air and an extensive view; and the society here is wretched. I daresay you will not mind it, as probably you haven't been used to anything different, but it bores me to death."

Ethel did not take umbrage at this remark, as a smaller-natured girl might have done. She understood perfectly that Julia meant to be unkind to her, but she also understood that people as a rule do not mean to be unkind unless they are also unhappy; so she pitied the handsome, dissatisfied girl sitting beside her, and wondered what crook had come into this woman's lot.

"But, somehow, one seems independent of society in the country," she said; "in a town, I grant you, one's fellow-

creatures are a necessity, as there is nothing else ; but there is so much in the country to interest and amuse one, that other people don't really matter."

"Still you must speak to the people about you," snapped Miss Welford ; "and here they are the dullest set imaginable, to whom it is not worth while to speak at all. Now in London you can pick and choose, and go in for congenial society ; but here you must take what there is and make the best of it—and bad's the best, I can assure you."

"But I think that in London one is too apt to pick and choose—too eclectic, I suppose I ought to say. Because there you can get the cream of everything, you are inclined to take nothing but cream ; and cream is not altogether satisfactory as one's sole diet. Something rather more substantial is needed, don't you think?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

Ethel was so much interested in her subject that she did not notice Julia's snubbing, but went on : "Now in the country it is different. There you can only know a few people, and you know them thoroughly, and are able to study their characters all through. And this is much more interesting and amusing, just as it is better to know a few books well than to skip a whole circulating library."

"Is your situation in London?"

"I live there for the greater part of the year."

"And do you like it?"

Ethel Harland sighed. "No ; I simply hate the sight of the place."

"How queer of you ! I love London."

"Do you ? I don't expect you would, though, if you had as much of it as I have."

"But, of course, we see it under such different auspices," said Julia, in her superior way. "I daresay if I had to work for my living I should not enjoy it any more than

you do. But when we go to London we do it thoroughly well. We stop at the Grand Hotel, and hire a private brougham, and take places in the dress-circle at all the theatres."

Ethel's eyes twinkled. She had a keen sense of humour, and Miss Welford's ideas as to how to live in London tickled her. She was only five-and-twenty; but she had had to fight the battle of life for herself ever since she grew up, and so her powers and perceptions were well developed. She sometimes grew a little tired of fighting for herself, poor child! and envied the girls who had fathers to fight for them and mothers to comfort them. But she was brave on the whole, and did not waste her time nor dim her pretty eyes by crying for moons which could never be hers.

"The worst of living in a place like this," continued Julia, "is that there is nobody to appreciate you. I daresay other girls do not feel this as I do; but mine is a very difficult nature to understand, and commonplace people do not in the least comprehend me."

"Oh! I think we all feel like that when we are very young, and imagine that no one else has ever shared our thoughts and feelings. But don't you think that the comfort of growing older is that we gradually learn that we are not at all peculiar, but that everybody feels exactly as we do, and that we are really quite easy to understand? I am always so thankful to know that I am primitive and normal, and not in any way remarkable."

Julia Welford did not at all approve of this sentiment. It was her delight to imagine that she possessed a rare and exotic nature, which was incomprehensible to the common herd; and this young woman's way of ruthlessly classing her with ordinary mortals struck her as extremely vulgar.

So, for the rest of the call, the relations between Ethel and Julia were a trifle strained.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE WELFORDS' PARTY.

"She cheered each dry committee  
With tales of absent folk ;  
And let nor truth nor pity  
Impair her little joke ;  
Till loves were soiled and lives were spoiled  
By every word she spoke."

IT is proverbial that the ruling power of a house is generally vested in the worst temper therein ; therefore Julia Welford had her way, and the Morgans were invited to what was called in Sunnysdale "a friendly evening," instead of being treated to a dinner. "A friendly evening" began in coffee and closed in a cold supper, and was an enjoyable form of entertainment to all such as were old enough and wise enough not to sigh for a *l'le-à-l'le*. For this it offered little or no opportunity, and so was inferior—in the eyes of the young and foolish—to a dance, a dinner-party, and most emphatically to a picnic.

Julia was right in her surmise that Ethel Harland would not have what girls call "a proper evening dress" ; instead of displaying the regulation arms and neck, she wore a gown of some clinging white material, up to her throat and down to her wrists ; but her beauty was so striking that she looked lovely even in this most simple attire. At least, so Percy Welford thought.

One of the peculiarities of the Welfords' "friendly

evenings" was that the number of the guests and the number of the drawing-room chairs were identical, so that nobody could change his or her position unless somebody else were seized with a simultaneous desire. This, like the old custom of taking wine with people, depended too much upon the whim of another to be absolutely satisfactory to any one. It requires much self-confidence, added to considerable *savoir faire*, to enable one to break away from one's anchorage in a crowded drawing-room until there is another haven in sight. Percy Welford, being a son of the house, and a man of the world into the bargain (according to his own estimation), wandered about the room with a small gilt chair, as if he had a rover's ticket; but every one else remained pretty much where Fate and Mrs. Welford had first placed them.

"Have you heard about Louie Beale?" asked little Miss Barber of her nearest neighbour.

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Cottle, the wife of a successful man of business; "what of her?"

"I believe she is in love with that young Mr. Adams who has taken the Palmers' house."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Cottle excitedly; "what ever makes you think so?"

Miss Barber lowered her voice to a stage whisper. "I saw him take off his hat to her in Trawley, and I am positive that she blushed."

"Maria, your imagination is running away with you," said Mrs. Cottle severely; "she might have been overheated with walking, and that heightened her colour."

"But she wasn't walking," explained the little spinster meekly; "she was standing talking to me, and we were arranging about the parish tea. I had just remarked to myself how very pale she looked—in fact I was going to recommend preserved hips-and-haws to her, they are so very good for the complexion—when Mr. Adams passed

and moved to her, and she went the colour of a rose, I assure you."

"It was very unwomanly of her," said Mrs. Cottle sternly, who in her mind's eye had set apart Mr. Adams for one of her own daughters.

Miss Barber pursed up her mouth. "I felt a little shocked myself, I must confess."

"Really, Maria Barber," chimed in old Mrs. Brown, "cannot you find something better to do than gossip about your neighbours? And that reminds me, Mrs. Cottle, have you heard that Mrs. Crowther's cook is leaving?"

"I am not surprised," said Mrs. Cottle; "Mrs. Crowther never can keep her servants."

"And for a very good reason, too," added Mrs. Brown mysteriously.

"Indeed; and what is that?"

"She makes them have dripping instead of butter three days a week, and of course they won't stand it."

"My word!" exclaimed Mrs. Cottle; "but do you feel sure of that, Mrs. Brown?"

"I am afraid so," answered Mrs. Brown, with a sigh; "you see, my Mary Jane is engaged to the butcher's boy, and his sister is Mrs. Crowther's housemaid, so she hears all about Mrs. Crowther's meannesses from him. And what makes it so disgraceful is that Mrs. Crowther's uncle died a few months ago and left them quite a nice little legacy, I believe. I am not at liberty to mention names, but I was told, on very good authority, that it was not much less than two thousand pounds."

"Dear me, dear me!" groaned Mrs. Cottle; "the love of money is indeed a most serious thing."

"Mrs. Cottle, you never said a truer word," agreed Mrs. Brown, with emphasis; "never; and you cannot say it too often."

The other acknowledged this compliment by an inclination of her best cap.

"I always say," continued Mrs. Brown, "that I admire nothing more than the way your young people are brought up, to despise mere outside things and to cultivate their higher tastes."

Mrs. Cottle looked pleased. It is always pleasant when we are publicly praised for excellences in which we are deficient.

"I try to train my girls genteelly," she said, "and to make them think of intellectual matters, such as geography or history or the acrostics in the weekly papers. But I have been rather vexed lately by seeing that they are inclined to be friendly with the new organist's granddaughter; and I cannot feel that a girl who lives in that common little house, and earns her own living, is a suitable friend for my dear children, who have been so carefully brought up, with no expense spared on their education."

Mrs. Brown nodded her approval. "You are quite right. One cannot be too careful in selecting companions for young girls; and I know how anxious you always are that your two should have every advantage."

"Miss Harland is an attractive young creature," remarked Miss Barber tentatively.

Mrs. Brown crushed her at once. "Handsome is as handsome does, Maria Barber; and you are old enough to know that without wanting me to teach you."

As it happened, five-and-forty years of handsome-doing without handsome-being had taught poor, plain, little Maria that, though the essence of the two states may be the same, the effects are extremely diverse; but she knew better than to expound this theory to the friends of her girlhood.

"Don't you think it would be nice if we had a little music?" said the hostess, rustling down the room to the



piano. "Maria Barber, my love, will you sing *She Wore a Wreath of Roses*?"

Maria simpered. "Won't some one else commence the evening's entertainment, dear Mrs. Welford? I hardly like to be the first."

"Very well, my dear, just as you like," answered Mrs. Welford, who was nothing if not indulgent; "perhaps Mr. Morgan will be kind enough to play something for us."

"Certainly, madam; I shall be delighted," said the organist, going to the piano. There was no doubt that Septimus Morgan was a remarkably handsome man; it was from him that his daughter had inherited the wonderful beauty which had captivated the heart of Lord Harland's only son.

Septimus played one of Beethoven's sonatas, and played it exquisitely; but he might as well have paved a pig-sty with mother-of-pearl, for all the thanks he received. Instrumental music was not the fashion in Sunnysdale; especially when it was of so abstruse a character that the ladies of the party could not carry on a humming accompaniment under their breath during the whole of the performance, nor the gentlemen beat time with their feet. But, as it never occurred to anybody that silence was an ingredient in the good manners of an audience, Mr. Morgan's admirable rendering of Beethoven was not nearly as great a nuisance as it might have been.

After Mrs. Welford had duly planted the organist at the piano, and so washed her hands of him, as she thought, for the time being, she joined the group of ladies by the fire.

"I saw you at church on Sunday morning, Mrs. Cottle," she began; "and I want to know what you think of the new collection-bags, or rather I suppose I ought to call them alms-bags. Julia said to me only this morning, 'Mamma, it is very old-fashioned to talk of collections; alms is the proper expression.' But we get very old-

fashioned without the young folks to teach us, don't we?" And Mrs. Welford laughed her stout and comfortable laugh.

But the mention of the alms-bags had touched too serious a chord in the mind of Mrs. Cottle for any levity to be possible to her; so she replied sternly:

"I did not approve of them at all, Mrs. Welford—not at all; and I wonder how Mr. Bailey could have countenanced such things."

"Take my word for it, they are the thin end of the wedge," added Mrs. Brown, with much sorrow of heart and some confusion of metaphor.

"At first when I saw them I thought of leaving the church altogether, and driving every Sunday morning into Clarewell, where they have collection-plates," continued Mrs. Cottle; "nice, straightforward things, you know, where all is open and above-board, and there is no mystery; but my husband said that if I went to service at Clarewell I should have to walk, as he wasn't going to have his horse out on a Sunday for the sake of all the collections in the country."

Mrs. Brown looked pityingly at Mrs. Cottle. "That is the worst of men," she remarked; "they are so selfish."

The late Mr. Brown had not numbered selfishness among the mistakes of his earthly career; but this was more his misfortune than his fault. Life with Mrs. Brown rendered unselfishness a compulsory virtue.

"What does Mr. Welford think of them?" Mrs. Cottle further inquired.

"Oh! my dear, fortunately he was so much occupied in seeing that the new organist didn't introduce any innovations into the service, that he quite overlooked the bags. And I said to Julia afterwards, 'Whatever you do, don't call your papa's attention to them, and as likely as not he'll never notice there is any change.' And he hasn't."

"I think you acted wisely," said Mrs. Cottle.

Mrs. Welford smiled. "Bless you! I haven't been married for thirty years without learning a thing or two; and one of them is, that it is dangerous for a woman to try to throw dust in a man's eyes. But if the dust happens to be there, she should let well alone, and thank heaven for it."

"I do not like to make mischief, nor to bear false witness against my neighbours; so perhaps I had better say no more," said Mrs. Brown, in a voice calculated to rouse curiosity in the breast of an oyster.

The heads of the three other ladies congregated together as if they had been the feet in a pigeon-pie.

"What is it, dear Mrs. Brown?" asked the hostess; "you may rest assured that whatever you tell us will go no farther."

"Indeed, no," added Miss Barber, flushing with interest. The little spinster dearly loved a morsel of gossip.

Mrs. Brown pursed up her mouth with an air of infinite mystery. "Of course, it may not be true," she murmured; "such false reports do get about, and I am sure I never can imagine how."

"Nor can I," agreed Mrs. Cottle, with a sorrowful shake of the head; "it is shocking how rumours are spread, without any foundation of truth; and yet one never can trace them. But what was it that you heard, Mrs. Brown?"

Mrs. Brown coughed, and looked reproachfully towards the piano, which was a little too loud just then for her stage whispers. Beethoven apparently had forgotten himself for the moment. Then—as the sonata gradually subsided—she said, in an ominous yet almost inaudible voice:

"I hear that there are four different sets of collection-bags, in four different colours, for various festivals of the Church."

There was a moment's pause of horror, and then Miss

Barber gasped: "I never heard such a thing in my life—never!"

"I knew you would be shocked," replied the informant with pride, as if to be shocked were the chief end of man—or, rather, of woman. As a matter of fact, in Sunnydale it was, as it is in all small villages.

The human soul—even if it be encased in a feminine body—is supposed to possess infinite possibilities: the possibilities of English village life are, to put it mildly, finite; and when the infinite puts on finality to the extent of devoting its powers to the contemplation and invention and publication of its neighbour's affairs, much mischief is done, and certain things are broken—such as hearts and spirits and the Ninth Commandment.

It is but fair to add that the human souls, whereby this mischief is wrought, mean no harm; they are merely amusing themselves by repeating what they have seen or heard or imagined, and amusement is a necessity of their being. May they be rewarded according to their intentions, and not according to their work!

Mrs. Welford glanced anxiously towards her husband. "I do hope that James didn't hear; he makes such a fuss about things. I only said to him the other day when he was worrying about something in the church, 'James,' I said, 'if you'd say your prayers with your eyes shut, as every good Christian ought to do, it would be better for all parties; but the fact is you are so busy watching out for the clergyman to disobey the rubric, that you have no time to see whether you yourself are obeying the Ten Commandments.' Eh, dear, dear! It is bad enough keeping things from the men in your own house on a week-day; but if you have not to do it in church on a Sunday as well, where does the day of rest come in, I should like to know?" The good woman spoke feelingly. Once upon a time small stools had been substituted for large

hassocks in the church where her father had worshipped for many years ; and this reformation had broken his heart.

"I couldn't have believed it, Mrs. Brown, if any one but you had told me," said Mrs. Cottle.

Mrs. Brown was now thoroughly enjoying herself. "That is not all," she added : "I hear that there are also four different-coloured bookmarkers to be used in reading the lessons ; and if that isn't Popery, I should like to know what is." Now Mrs. Brown was to Popery what a hazel-twig is to water : she could discover it in most unlikely and most unlooked-for places.

There was another pause of breathless astonishment, and then Mrs. Cottle gasped out : "Well I never ! It is stumbling-blocks such as this which undermine the Church of England." Mrs. Cottle became a very Joan of Arc when the Church of England was in danger, so ready was she to go forth as its champion. She had been born and brought up a Nonconformist, and spent her later years in endeavouring to wash out this youthful stain. Even now early habit was so strong upon her that she sometimes spoke of her parish priest as "the minister" ; but when this occurred she speedily corrected herself, and trusted that no one had overheard the slip.

"I am not narrow or bigoted," said Mrs. Brown, "and I thank Providence for it." She had a curious habit of thanking Providence for spiritual blessings which in her case had been signally withheld. "But I cannot approve of anything that is different from what it was when I was a child. What was good enough for me then is good enough for me now, I say ; and I really could not conscientiously read a Bible that was distorted by bookmarkers with Romanistic tendencies. They may preach what doctrines they like, as far as I am concerned ; I have nothing to say about that, as I am thankful to say I have always been broad and enlightened ; but one must draw the

line somewhere. and I draw it at innovations such as these. In fact my impression is that the Pope himself is at the bottom of this." Mrs. Brown's attitude towards His Holiness was ultra-Protestant. She believed that he was a giant, and she derived her ideas of his personal appearance entirely from the illustrations to the "Pilgrim's Progress." Further, she regarded him as the first of the three great Powers of Darkness—the second being Satan himself, and the third whatever statesman happened to be, for the time being, at the head of the Liberal party.

"Eh, dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. Welford. "I wonder what we are coming to. This news about the bookmarkers is very sad indeed." Her own daily portion was duly advertized to her by means of a bookmarker of perforated cardboard, whereon the design "No Cross No Crown" had been laboriously executed by Percy at the tender age of six. Consequently perforated cardboard—being what she was accustomed to—was to her the only material wherein really acceptable bookmarkers could be made.

"It is extremely painful!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown: "in fact so deeply do I feel it, that I am inclined to take upon myself to speak to Mr. Bailey upon the subject."

"Oh! I should hardly venture to take so bold a step as that," expostulated Mrs. Cottle, with the reverence of the neophyte.

"I only hope James won't notice them," groaned poor Mrs. Welford; "there'll be a fine to-do if he does. But maybe he won't, as fortunately his sight isn't as good as it was, and I generally contrive to mislay his spectacles on a Sunday morning just before starting to church. It is rather troublesome finding a new place to mislay them in every Sunday; but it saves such a lot of bother that it is worth the trouble."

"Whoever lives to see it," Mrs. Brown repeated, "will find out that I am right, and that this is all the Pope's

doing. He has had a finger in this pie, I am certain." If Mrs. Brown strenuously denied the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, she made up for it by preaching the omnipresence of His Holiness with a fervour which his most devout followers might have envied. She had once had a cook who was a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and when this domestic made culinary mistakes—as even Protestant cooks will sometimes do—Mrs. Brown regarded such mistakes as signs of some far-reaching plot originated by the Order of Jesuits. "Where there is Popery there are Jesuits," she continued, "and where there are Jesuits there are plots; and I shouldn't be surprised to learn that all this bookmarker business is a regular plot to overthrow the Church of England."

At this moment the sonata came to an end, and Mr. Morgan was again thrown on the hands of his hostess. So, with a supreme effort, she turned from the church to the world, and requested Miss Barber to render "She Wore a Wreath of Roses," while she herself sat down beside the organist.

"I hope you like Sunnydale," she began pleasantly; "it is considered a very pretty place, but for my part I like a little more life. I was brought up in Trawley, you know, and I have often remarked to my husband, 'Country life may be very agreeable, James, to those that are accustomed to it, but town life for me.'"

Septimus Morgan smiled. "My wife will agree with you, Mrs. Welford, for she loves nothing so well as shops; but I am afraid that Ethel and I must confess to much simpler tastes."

"I expect you like views and things of that kind—some people do; but a well-furnished shop-window is worth all the landscapes in the world, to my thinking. It seems to me that fine scenery is like fine music—you have to fill it up with your own fine thoughts or there is no fineness in it.

But shop-windows are shop-windows, and are complete in themselves, even to the prices."

"I think I know what you mean," answered the organist gently. One of Mr. Morgan's great charms was that he always took the trouble to enter into other people's feelings and to look at things from other people's point of view; "you mean that you prefer pleasures and interests which are independent of the aid of imagination. Yes, I understand, and it is very interesting to me to see how persons with different temperaments look at life."

Mrs. Welford felt distinctly flattered. It was not often that people took the trouble to be interested in her views about anything. She never dreamt of complaining of this; she took it as a matter of course that in her own eyes—and in the eyes of everybody else—she was the mistress of Fairlawn and nothing more. Many middle-aged women accept the position of mere housekeepers; but that does not mean that they like it.

During the evening Percy frequently anchored himself by the side of Ethel Harland, and leaned over the corner of her chair in the attitude of an old-fashioned photograph, while he indulged in such conversation as he deemed appropriate from the lips of a genius into the ear of a beauty.

"If I am not mistaken," he began, "an evening such as this must be as uncongenial to you as it is to me, Miss Harland. You and I can have no sympathy with all these people; and if we showed our real selves to them they would not understand us. Yet it is weary work always to wear a mask."

The idea of Percy's wearing a mask in the midst of a circle which knew his every mature foible as it had followed his every childish complaint, was not without its amusing side; but Ethel Harland had not lived long enough in Sunnydale to know this. That is one of the advantages of



living in one neighbourhood for some time—one knows what is funny and what is not. It takes longer to learn the jokes of a place than to become a naturalized citizen.

“Then why wear it?” inquired Ethel.

“Because it would be sacrilege to throw open the recesses of one’s spirit to people such as these. For years I have longed for congenial companionship, but at last I have come to the conclusion that soul-solitude is to be my portion.”

“That must be wretched!”

“Most things are wretched in this world, but most things can be borne. I never talk about my loneliness; but when I die I mean to have ‘Misunderstood’ engraven on my tombstone,” said Percy, with a sad smile.

“Do you? I mean to have ‘Miss Harland’ engraven on mine,” retorted Ethel, and her smile was not so sad.

“Ah! you trifle; but you have not experienced my sense of aloneness. It is terrible to live in a world of shadows, who know not why you laugh or why you weep.”

It seemed inappropriate to describe a circle, wherein Mr. and Mrs. Welford were the principal figures, as “a world of shadows”; but the language of poetry must not be taken too literally.

“You are like the foreigner who meant that he was ‘terribly alone’ but said that he was ‘awfully single’; nevertheless it is horrid to be with friends who take one’s comedies tragically and one’s tragedies comically,” agreed Ethel; “and I always say that people who laugh at the same things are more to one another than people who cry at the same things.”

This was a little too deep for Percy—especially as laughter was not his strong point.

“That is a superficial view of the case,” he said in his most didactic manner: “identity of taste as to what is humorous is no indication of real sympathy.”

“Don’t you think so? To me it would be an indication

of the deepest sympathy. Of course humour and pathos are very nearly allied, but I think that humour is the more subtle sense of the two; and that, therefore, two minds which agree as to what is humorous are more closely akin than two minds which only agree as to what is pathetic."

Ethel was extremely fond of analysing emotions.

Percy shook his head. "Believe me, you are wrong, Miss Harland; totally wrong."

But Ethel was interested in the subject, and would not be silenced just because a man said she was wrong; which, of course, was foolish of her.

"Take, for instance, the difference between classes," she persisted; "no two classes of society agree as to what is humorous; yet all classes, broadly speaking, agree as to what is pathetic. Two people, very far apart in the social scale, will cry at the same thing; but if two people laugh at the same thing, you may conclude that socially they are pretty much on a par. Don't you see what I mean?"

"Perfectly," replied Percy, who did not in the least; "and I say that—like all women—you are inclined to be shallow and superficial in your views of life. There is a strong melancholy strain in my nature, as I suppose there must be in the nature of any thinking man; and therefore sad things touch me far more quickly than do amusing ones. You, with your lighter disposition, will perhaps not understand me."

"Perhaps not," answered Ethel, though she did perfectly.

"Women's tears appeal to me far more than women's smiles," continued Percy, who had never seen a woman cry in his life, except his mother when the cook gave notice.

"But the two are so near akin."

Percy raised his eyebrows in surprise. "My dear Miss Harland, they are the exact opposite of each other—the two extremes of the gamut of human emotion."

Ethel perceived that to such a mind as Percy's, argument was of no avail ; so she wisely changed the subject, and asked if he had read anything of interest lately.

" I hardly ever read," he replied gloomily ; " there are so few books worth reading."

Ethel laughed ; she could not help it. " I am afraid I shall shock you then, for I read nearly every new book that comes out—that is to say, as many as I have time for."

" Do you mean to say you read modern novels ? "

" Yes."

Percy shuddered. " No modern novelist can write English."

" I'm awfully fond of poetry too," added Ethel.

" There are only two English poets—Crabbe and Blake."

" I confess I find a good many more ; but I suppose I am one of the people who are easily pleased," remarked Miss Harland, with a twinkle in her eye.

" Ah ! I envy you ; it is my fate to be only satisfied with perfection, and my foible to see faults with terrible clearness."

" It must feel nice to be so clever and to know so much ! " said Ethel sweetly.

Percy thought he had never met a more simple-minded young woman, and he began to enjoy himself.

Ethel thought she had never met a more simple-minded young man, and she began to enjoy herself also.

They went in to supper together, and became very friendly. Percy expounded his views upon art as well as upon literature, and showed how painters could not paint any more than writers could write. Ethel drew him out, and drank in all he said with delight. As far as they two were concerned it really was a most successful party.

On the whole the Welfords' evening passed off well.

The hosts felt as if they had paid a bill and got the receipt ; and that is always a comfortable sensation.

Mrs. Brown and her circle felt that the conversational stock which they had collected on that occasion would, when properly watered down by additions of improvements drawn from the stores of their own imaginations, make sufficient gossip to feed a whole village for a week.

And Ethel Harland, reproduced, for the benefit of her grandparents, the principal characters in Sunnydale, till the "poky" little house rang with laughter.

Percy Welford managed to see Ethel frequently after this. She was the most attractive girl he had ever met, and she had the effect that the most attractive girl a man has ever met usually has. Percy felt that she appreciated him—which was quite true; fortunately for the poor young man's peace of mind he had no idea how true it was.

It happened that a few days after this Percy ran up to London on business, and when he came back he informed his mother that he had accidentally come across an old schoolfellow—Jack Le Mesurier by name—and invited the same down to Fairlawn for a week.

"Who is he?" asked Julia.

"He is a nephew of Sir Roger Le Mesurier, of Grey-stone."

"Then he is very well off," remarked Mr. Welford, who never lost sight of the main chance.

"Oh no, he isn't," answered Percy. "Of course Grey-stone is a fine place, but it is not entailed; and though Sir Roger is rich enough, Jack is extremely poor. His father quarrelled with his family and was cut off with a shilling. And now Jack has nothing but his pay."

"Then won't the title come to him?" inquired Julia.

"Yes; that must. But he will have nothing with it, as he and Sir Roger are not on friendly terms, and Sir Roger can leave the estate and the fortune as he likes. So Jack is not a man to be envied, in spite of his old name and family."

"He'll have to marry money—that is what he'll have to do; he ought to get something pretty considerable in return for making a young woman into 'my lady,'" said Mr. Welford.

"Le Mesurier is a handsome man," remarked Percy gloomily, "but he has no soul."

"My dear, how can you tell?" asked Mrs. Welford, with her usual good sense.

"Oh! he talks about low things, such as horses and dogs, and has no finer feelings—no subtler instincts."

"He'll be none the worse for that," said Mr. Welford. "Girls like men who talk about horses and dogs—they think it is manly, and girls with money marry the sort of men they like."

"While girls without money have to marry the sort of men who like them, I suppose," added Julia.

Her father nodded. "Precisely, my dear; beggars mustn't be choosers, you know."

## CHAPTER IV.

### *JACK LE MESURIER.*

"If we'd fail not in the quest,  
We must find the way  
With the one we love the best ;  
So the children say."

**J**ACK LE MESURIER came down to Sunnydale to stay with his old schoolfellow, Percy Welford, and he found the life at Fairlawn quite a new phase in his experience.

He and the Welfords had absolutely nothing in common ; they looked at life from totally different standpoints, and they moved along parallel lines which would never meet, even in infinity. Like all persons to whom refinement is an acquired taste, Percy and his sister had it in an aggravated—one might almost say in an inflammatory—form ; they were shocked at simplicity, and regarded as vulgar what was merely natural.

Jack inwardly designated his former schoolfellow a "bounder," and decided to cut his visit to Sunnydale as short as was compatible with good manners ; but the gods saw otherwise, and Jack saw Ethel Harland, and therefore he stayed on until he was called to town on business—that is to say, until Ethel had gone back to London.

Julia admired Captain Le Mesurier immensely, and was extremely anxious that he should likewise admire her. But—as was usual with Julia—she went the wrong way to work.

In the first place, she confided her troubles to him, and tried to enlist his sympathy. From the days of Desdemona downwards, women, as a rule, like the men whom they pity; men, on the contrary, ~~only~~ pity the women whom they like. Consequently Jack was bored to death by the recital of Julia's difficulties at home, and thought how tiresome it was that so good-looking a girl was not more amusing.

In the second place, Julia never lost a chance of scoring in conversation; and the woman who scores deserves all the hatred that she gets. Of course, it is clever to say sharp things; but it is generally far cleverer not to say them. Nevertheless, it often takes more than six-and-twenty years to acquire the cleverness which can conceal cleverness.

And, thirdly and lastly, Julia Welford was not wanting in acidity; and acidity in women—as in wine—is a quality which lowers the value of the article altogether.

After Captain Le Mesurier had been two days at Fairlawn, and was making plans of escape, Percy suggested that skating on the pool in Sunnydale Park might prove an agreeable pastime; and Jack, longing for anything to relieve the tedium of the Welfords' instructive conversation, jumped at the idea. But Julia frowned.

"You will derive no pleasure from it, Captain Le Mesurier," she said. "The ice is extremely rough, and there are always such common people there."

"Oh! I don't mind the people; and as for the ice, it can't be as bad as I am."

"I should have imagined that you would be fond of skating; you always consider physical so much more important than mental exercise, that I wonder you have left any branch of it neglected," said Julia, unable to resist the temptation of giving Jack a dig.

He smiled. "I used to be all right on the ice seven years ago; but we don't get much skating in India, you see."

"Oh! of course not; I forgot for the moment that you had lived there so long."

Julia could not bear to be in the wrong, so she felt distinctly irritated against her brother's friend; and his next remark did not serve to allay that irritation.

"Your brother has been telling me all about Miss Harland. What a romantic story it is!"

"I do not perceive much romance in it, I am bound to say."

Captain Le Mesurier raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Don't you? It seems to me awfully quaint, somehow, to think of one twin sister so poor and the other so rich. Just like a novel, don't you know?"

"You will not think it so interesting when you have seen the parties," answered Julia, not knowing that it is worse to use such a word as "parties" than never to have read Browning.

But Jack knew.

"I have seen the other sister," he said, rather coldly.

"And what is she like, may I ask?"

"Oh! she is extremely handsome, and one of the best-dressed girls in London."

"A regular woman of fashion, I suppose," said Julia.

"That's about it."

"I must confess I am not partial to people of that kind," remarked Miss Welford primly.

Jack repressed a shudder. What awful words the woman used, he thought.

"There is no real culture to be found in fashion's votaries," continued Julia.

"Isn't there?" said Jack.

"No; they have no time for study, and it is by intellectual pursuits only that true refinement is obtained. I cannot tell you how I delight in study, Captain Le Mesurier; it is my one recreation. I belong to four



different reading societies, and I have never been fined once for not reading my full amount every day."

"Really. How awfully clever of you!"

Julia bridled. She thought that when a man called a woman clever it was a sign of admiration. She had yet much to learn.

"Yes, Captain; each society entails upon its members the duty of reading an instructive book for twenty consecutive minutes every day, and each of the four societies inculcates a different branch of study."

"Dear me! It must be very tiring."

"No; I do not find it so. When I commenced I felt it somewhat of a tie, but now it has become a second nature to me. In fact I should be quite lost without it. But I think it a duty as well as a delight to cultivate one's mind to the utmost of one's powers. Do not you?"

"I am afraid I don't; at any rate, I don't act up to the theory. I'm a dreadfully ignorant beggar, you know."

"I suppose we have all something to learn," said Miss Welford consolingly; "and if we are only willing to be taught, everybody whom we meet has something to teach us. It always appears to me such a pity to meet people in society and talk nothing but nonsense to them; while, if only we hit upon the correct chord, we should be able on both sides to learn and to teach."

Jack smiled. "But don't you think that it is often when we are talking nonsense that we learn the most? It is the women who talk nonsense to us—not the women who try to instruct us—that really teach us things. And there is nonsense and nonsense, you see."

"I cannot think that talking nonsense is anything but a waste of time," replied Julia severely.

"Not even clever nonsense?"

"I never heard any clever nonsense."

"Oh! I have; and likewise sense that is very far from being clever."

In spite of Julia's protestations, Percy escorted his guest to the pool in Sunnysdale Park; and the scene exhilarated and delighted Jack, though there was really nothing remarkable in it. There were the usual commonplace skaters, who are content to pursue the even tenor of their way round and round the ice; and the usual brilliant exceptions, who perform acrobatic gyrations round an unappetizing orange; and the helpless and hopeless beginners, who struggle on, by the aid of a chair, with despair in their hearts and toothache in their feet. But it was so long since Jack had seen an English winter scene that it quite excited him.

"Isn't it just like a Christmas card or a December supplement?" he exclaimed.

"My dear fellow, there is no art in Christmas cards nor in illustrated supplements. I never look at such things."

"You would, though, if you had been out of England for seven years."

"Pardon me," argued Percy; "my being out of England for a hundred years would not make what is ugly beautiful, nor what is beautiful ugly. Art is independent of circumstance."

"Art may be, but I am not, my dear Welford. But who is that girl skating past us just now? She is the image of Elfrida Harland."

"That is Ethel Harland—the girl I was telling you about—your Miss Harland's twin sister."

"Introduce me, there's a good fellow. She is the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life."

So Percy did as he was bid, and introduced Captain Le Mesurier to Miss Harland. And Jack soon ceased to think of Ethel as the most beautiful, or the most anything, woman; to him she became the only woman in the world; so there

was no necessity for adjectives, and no possibility of comparisons.

He had thought Elfrida the handsomest woman he had ever met, but her cynicism had cancelled to some extent the effect of her beauty. But here was a woman with Elfrida's face and voice and figure, and as straightforward and cheerful withal as the simplest country maid. If Elfrida had seemed as nice as she looked, Jack would have fallen in love with her; Ethel looked as nice as Elfrida, and seemed even nicer than she looked—therefore the result of her meeting with Jack was a foregone conclusion.

For the rest of that day these two skated together, and left poor Percy—literally and figuratively—out in the cold. He bore it as well as he could, and passed the time by planning for himself an early and pathetic death. But planning an early death for oneself—however effective from a dramatic point of view—is chilly work with the thermometer in its 'teens.

Jack and Ethel got on well together from the first. They were not particularly brilliant, from a conversational point of view, but they thoroughly amused each other; and, besides, they were so happy in each other's company that they did not want amusing. They enjoyed themselves, and talked nonsense to each other, and laughed at everything, like two children; and at the end of the day they each mentally divided their lives into two equal parts: that afternoon being one, and their whole preceding histories the other; which is, after all, the only proper way of computing time.

When their friendship was firmly established—that is to say, about twenty minutes after they had been introduced to each other—Jack said:

“Do you know that I've had the pleasure of meeting your sister?”

Ethel was immensely interested at once.

"Oh! have you really? Do tell me about her, for I have never seen her."

"Not seen your twin sister? I never heard of such a thing."

"No: we were separated when we were babies, and haven't met since. My grandfather, Lord Harland, made it a stipulation that we were to be kept completely apart before he consented to adopt one of us."

"Then does your sister never write to you?" asked Jack.

"No: we have had nothing to do with each other since we were parted in our cradles, five-and-twenty years ago."

"I'm afraid you will think me awfully inquisitive, asking you all these questions," said Jack bluntly; "but I'm not really meaning to be impertinent—it's only that I'm so tremendously interested in you."

"I understand; it would never have occurred to me to call anything that you did impertinent."

Jack blushed like a girl at this compliment.

"Then you will let me tell your sister all about you when next I see her?"

"Certainly, if you like; but it won't make any difference."

"Of course it is awfully impudent of a rough fellow like me to criticize such a fine lady as Miss Harland; but I cannot help feeling that if I were in her place I should look after you a bit. Surely now that Lord Harland is dead she can do as she likes."

Ethel smiled rather sadly. "No, she can't; nobody can; and if you knew everything, I think you wouldn't blame her."

"Still, it is rather hard on you that she should have all the smooth, and you all the rough."

"I suppose it is: I have often longed to change places with my sister, I admit, my life has been so hard sometimes and so lonely; and she has escaped all the battles that I have had to fight. But it is babyish to want to change

places with other people, don't you think? Surely you are not going to make a coward of me, and you a soldier!"

Jack's voice was very gentle, though his heart was full of anger against Elfrida. "Heaven forbid! But I think I should like to fight some of your battles for you."

"That is very nice of you!" and Ethel smiled up into the kind face. "But I am used to fighting my own."

"I know; and that must have been so horrid for you," answered Jack, tugging at his moustache and still vowing vengeance against Elfrida.

"And now tell me all about my sister," said Ethel; "though I have never seen her I'm awfully interested to hear about her. Is she anything like me?"

And then Jack told Ethel how Elfrida was the most beautiful woman in the world bar one, though he pointedly omitted to mention the exception; and how fashionable she was, and how clever, and how cold. All of which Ethel drank in with absorbing interest, and kept asking for more. From Elfrida they drifted to other topics; and Ethel soon heard a great deal about Jack's life in India, and learnt how lonely he had been since his parents died, and how he wished he had had a brother, or a sister. In fact, they had so much to say to each other that they were quite surprised when the afternoon came to an end. And there really was no occasion for surprise on their part, as afternoons are prone to come to a premature end within a month from the shortest day.

For the rest of Jack's visit to Fairlawn he frequented Sunnysdale pool from frosty morn to foggy eve; and, with a consideration which Nature does not always show for the love affairs of her children, the frost continued and the ice held out. The Welford family, as was natural, made ill-bred jokes upon the subject of his obvious admiration for the organist's granddaughter, love being the one thing which never fails to tickle the *bourgeois* sense of humour.

But by that time Jack was so much in love that he did not even mind being laughed at ; and that means he was very much in love indeed.

He had not as yet said anything to Ethel—that is to say, he thought he had not—because he was not in a position to marry anybody, least of all a girl without a penny of her own ; and it distressed him a great deal to think that Ethel would go back to London without knowing how much he cared for her. Of course Ethel knew well enough, but she pretended that she did not ; and she pretended so well that Jack was completely taken in, and thought that she looked upon him only in the light of a friend. And yet Jack Le Mesurier was generally sharp enough where women were concerned.

“ I say, you will let me come and see you in town, won't you ? ” he besought humbly, one day when Ethel's time at Sunnydale was nearly at an end.

Ethel shook her head. “ I think you had better not.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I think it would be wiser.”

“ Do you mean that the people you are living with mightn't like it ? Because if they are going to bully you like that, the sooner that I tell them what I think of them the better.”

Still Ethel was obstinate. “ I'd really rather you didn't come.”

“ Of course I wouldn't for worlds do anything you didn't like, but how am I to live without seeing you ? ”

“ I can't tell. I'm not a doctor. Still, lots of people do live without seeing me, so I suppose the deprivation is not as dangerous as one would imagine.”

Jack laughed, though his heart was heavy. He and Ethel made a point of always laughing at each other's jokes ; that was one reason why they were so fond of one another.

"Well, at any rate I can write to you. Where shall you be?"

"I really don't know; travelling about, I expect. But any letters sent to me here will be forwarded all right."

"And you will come down here at Easter?"

Ethel nodded. "I suppose so; I always spend holiday times with my grandparents."

For a few minutes they skated in silence. It was glorious flying along at that pace over the black ice; and the fact that they were holding one another's hands in no way detracted from the glory.

Then Jack said in a very low voice: "May I come down at Easter, too?"

"Of course you may if you like; but I should think you'd find it rather dull. There will be no skating at Easter, you know."

"I suppose not."

"And you found it dreadfully dull here till you began to skate," persisted Ethel; "you told me you did."

"That also is true. But there are other things in life besides skating."

"As, for instance?"

"Miss Welford's reading societies; I might join them, you see." And they both laughed.

After another delightful silence Jack said suddenly: "Tell me one thing: are the people you live with in London kind to you?"

Ethel's eyes grew sad. "Kind enough in their way; but they don't really care for me. It wouldn't matter to them if I died to-morrow. My place would be filled up, and nobody would mind."

"Poor child, it must be lonely for you!"

"It is; horribly lonely, cruelly lonely! And the loneliness hurts me. It is so dreadful to feel that in the whole of London there is nobody that really cares. You can't

think how I envy girls with fathers and mothers and people of their own."

"I understand." And Jack's face was very tender.

"Yes; you always do. I knew the minute I saw you that you were an understanding person, and I am never wrong in my first impressions."

"People who do understand are a comfort, aren't they?" remarked Jack.

"Oh! yes. I divide humanity into the people who understand and the people who don't; that is the only difference that matters."

"It isn't an equal division, I must confess; for the people who don't understand are in an enormous majority."

Ethel nodded. "In fact, you and I are the only ones I ever met on the other side. We are in a minority of two."

"But it is enough, don't you think?"

"Plenty. It is what magistrates call a quotient or a quorum or something."

"If it is enough, it ought to content us," remarked Jack; "people can but get what they want."

"But it must be difficult always to know if the thing you have is the thing you want," suggested Ethel, who was prone to analyse her feelings too much.

But Jack's common sense pulled her round again. "Not a bit of it. When you've got what you want, you know fast enough."

"But how do you know that afterwards you won't want something else more?"

"Because you do: that's all I can tell you. Did you never hear the Indian story of the end room?"

"No: tell it to me."

"Once upon a time," began Jack, "there was a man who had saved the life of a king; and the king said he would give him whatever he asked for. And as the man was going into the palace to make his choice, the princess met



him, and whispered in passing, 'Be satisfied with nothing short of the end room.' So the man decided to take the hint."

"He was a wise man," remarked Ethel, "to know at once that a woman knew better than he did."

"He didn't know at once: he was thirty years old, and till he was twenty-nine he had thought he knew better than any woman did. That was why he was a bachelor, and had time to save the lives of kings instead of getting his own living."

"I see; go on."

"Where was I? Oh! I know. Well, being over thirty, he had seen enough of life to know that it is always wise to take the hints of people who have been behind the scenes. So when the king showed him a room filled with copper, he said, 'This won't do; I must go on to the next room.'"

"I suppose rooms in palaces always open out of each other as they do in Grand Hotels," interpolated Ethel.

"Of course they do—it is inconvenient and palatial; but you mustn't interrupt. You break the thread of my story."

"Well, go on; you'd got to the copper room."

"Then the king showed him the next room, which was full of silver; but still he said he must go one better. The king threw open the door of the silver room and showed that it led to a room full of gold; and still the man said it wasn't good enough. And he went on from one room to another—from gold to rubies, and from rubies to emeralds, and from emeralds to diamonds—till he came to a room where there was nothing but the princess herself. And then he pulled up and said, *Thank you*, he would trouble the king no further."

"How did he know he had come to the end room?" inquired Ethel.

“That was just what the king asked him. ‘How did you know that there was not another room with something still better?’ ‘Because there is nothing better,’ answered the man. So he married the princess.”

“Then do you think we all know when we come to the end room?” inquired Ethel, after a moment’s silence.

“Perfectly; and most of us get there some time or another. But whether we can afford to marry the princess when we are there, is another and a less agreeable side of the question.”

## CHAPTER V.

### BEFORE EASTER.

"If I were you, my heart would be  
Itself its kingdom ever new;  
But I'd make room in it for me,  
If I were you."

THE pleasantest part of the London season is the part which comes before Easter.

In the first place the weather is not sufficiently inviting to make people homesick for the country. And in the second, there are as yet so few social engagements that thanks are still due from the entertained to the entertainers, instead of *vice versa*.

It was a very wet spring, that first spring of Jack Le Mesurier's life in England. The streets were greasy with black mud, and the parks were dotted over with little brown pools, which, owing to the blades of grass showing above the face of the waters, presented the appearance of mint sauce. Consequently it was nicer indoors than out; and it was specially nice inside the late Lord Harland's town residence.

Jack did not see Elfrida very often; but he talked to her whenever he met her in society, and he met her whenever he had the chance; also, he called now and then at the house in Mayfair. All this he did, not for his own gratification, but for Ethel's sake, because he thought it might help towards bringing her and Elfrida

together; at least, so he said to himself, and he of course knew all the ins and outs of the matter.

One rainy afternoon he found Elfrida and Mrs. Seeley sitting indoors, when he called upon them about five o'clock. Jack felt that it was time for him to begin to plead Ethel's cause, if he ever meant to plead it; and with him to mean anything was to do it. The thing that he intended was the thing that he did—and he generally did it well into the bargain. So he accordingly began, after his hostess had provided him with a cup of tea:

"Do you know, I am thinking of adopting the *role* of a peacemaker, Miss Harland?"

Elfrida smiled lazily. "I would dissuade you from undertaking the part."

"Why?"

"Because experience has taught me that peacemaking is a most dangerous pastime. Nearly all the mischief that I have ever come across has been wrought by peacemakers. It is wonderful how much harm they can do in a comparatively short time!"

"Oh! you naughty, naughty girl," interpolated Arabella; "how can you say such things?"

"Because I think them. Nine times out of ten, peacemaking is a euphemism for interference; and interference is invariably a synonym for impertinence."

"Nevertheless, don't you think that sometimes a third person can bring two quarrelsome people together again?" persisted Jack.

"I never met with a case. The usual result of such a course is that the two original quarrellers hate each other twice as much as they did before, and the peacemaker twice as much as they hate each other. No, Captain Le Mesurier, I think that peacemaking—like matrimony—is an exercise which should not be unadvisedly taken in hand."

Jack laughed ; but he could not help wishing that Elfrida would not look so much like Ethel. She was so exactly like Ethel—and yet so utterly different—that she tantalized him. It is always irritating when strangers take the liberty of masquerading in the bodily forms of our best-beloved ; it is an infringement of the laws of patent and copyright ; and Jack was not the first man who has felt annoyed when the sister that he did not care for, looked at him with the eyes and talked to him with the voice of the sister that he did.

“Moreover,” continued Elfrida, in her indifferent manner, “quarrelling is an abstruse science ; and spoiling a pretty quarrel is on a par, to my mind, with shooting a fox.”

“Ah ! Elfrida,” sighed Mrs. Seeley, “you don’t know what you are talking about. Quarrels are sad, sad things which disturb one’s rest and destroy one’s appetite.”

“Not if they are properly carried on,” replied Miss Harland.

“I quite agree with you there,” cried Jack ; “I am an accomplished quarreller ; and I flatter myself that every woman who has had the pleasure of quarrelling with me will confess that I have conducted the case with the utmost ability.”

“I can quite believe it,” said Elfrida ; “what is your plan of campaign, may I ask ?”

“Oh ! it is simple enough. When I am in the wrong, I say that I am in the wrong ; when she is in the wrong I still say that I am in the wrong. She forgives me in either case, I find, though less readily in the latter than in the former.”

Elfrida nodded approval. “I see ; it is a method such as this which renders penitence a fine art, and pardon a foregone conclusion.”

“Just so,” said Jack.

“You young people do not know what you are talking

about," sighed Mrs. Seeley ; " lovers' quarrels are dangerous things."

" So are oysters," agreed Captain Le Mesurier ; " but that doesn't make them any the less nice."

" I had a terrible one with Willy Chase, years and years ago—a quarrel I mean, not an oyster," continued the widow pensively.

" Tell us about it," entreated Elfrida, who always enjoyed Arabella's sentimental reminiscences. Jack, also, was by now accustomed to them, and appreciated them warmly ; in fact his enjoyment was only second to that of the reciter herself.

" It was over an ' intermediate,' I remember, and Willy meant us to go up to supper together instead of dancing it ; but I had been up to supper with somebody else—I think it was Teddy Simpson—and came back when the dance was half over. Willy was very rude and cross, and said that I was utterly heartless, and then sulked openly for the rest of the evening."

" If you will pardon me for saying it, that was distinctly inartistic of Mr. Chase," remarked Elfrida.

Arabella sighed. " He was very young."

" Ah ! that comes to the same thing."

" He went up to supper afterwards with another girl ; I know that he didn't enjoy it, but he said that he did."

Captain Le Mesurier shook his head sorrowfully. " That was indeed crude. An older man would have enjoyed his supper, and have said that he had not."

" He seemed to think that I had done it on purpose."

" Well, hadn't you ? " asked Jack ; " it seems funny to go up to supper unconsciously, or even inadvertently."

" Oh ! I mean he thought that I had treated him badly on purpose : and I really had not. But he was positively rude to me for weeks afterwards."

" I can quite believe that," remarked Elfrida ; " there is

never anybody so rude to a woman as the men who happen to be in love, and out of temper, with her."

"Oh, Love, Love, what blunders are committed in thy name!" paraphrased Jack.

"And I don't see that loving a woman gives a man the right to say nasty things to her; do you?" said Elfrida. "It is only marrying her that does that, I believe."

"You don't mean what you say," replied Jack rather sharply.

"Of course not; if I did, I shouldn't say it. A woman is known, not by what she says, but by what she doesn't say. Have you yet to learn that, my dear sir?"

"No; I already have an inkling of it. Nevertheless I am still prone to believe that people think what they say and say what they think."

Miss Harland shook her head. "I cannot commend such extremely simple ideas. Willy Chase himself could hardly have been more elementary."

Jack laughed.

"If you don't take care," continued Elfrida, "you will end by believing that women dislike the men whom they abuse, and are in love with those whom they openly praise. You have no idea how these childish faiths grow upon one!"

"Well, if I heard that a girl had abused me, I should conclude that she did not like me much," said Jack simply.

"Again I am reminded of Willy Chase. Now I have learnt that if a woman appears to hate a man, she really has begun to care for him and is not yet sure whether he cares for her; it is a form of hedging. But if she appears utterly indifferent to him, they both care, and have told each other so."

"Then what does she do when she really is indifferent?"

"She says he is a delightful creature and dances divinely, and she wishes he would take her in to supper."

"And what when she really hates him?" persisted Jack.

"That he is a most excellent person, and she has the greatest respect for him, but it is a pity that he is so dreadfully middle-class."

Jack smiled. "You are very clever."

"I suppose so; but you don't approve of my cleverness all the same."

"Don't I?"

"No; you think I am far too bitter and cynical for a woman."

"Perhaps so; but bitterness and cleverness have nothing to do with each other, as far as I can see. As a matter of fact I so much approve of your cleverness that it riles me to see you letting it turn sour."

"Ah! Captain Le Mesurier, how sensible you are," cried Mrs. Seeley. "I am always telling our dear Elfrida that she does herself an injustice when she says such naughty, sarcastic things."

Elfrida yawned. "You are both horribly improving this afternoon! But I thought all men hated cleverness."

"Not a bit of it," replied Jack; "but I'll tell you what we do hate, and that is 'intelligence.' The sort of woman that people call 'intelligent' is the most awful nuisance in the world. She asks you what you have been reading lately, and what you think of the political situation, and whether you have studied the reports of the British Association."

"I know her," said Elfrida; "she combines the respectable dulness of a Church Congress with the mental fatigue of a mathematical tripos, and yet never loses the lynx-eyed exactingness of the unattractive woman."

"But all women cannot be attractive, darling Elfrida," remonstrated Arabella, with the self-conscious simper of one who could.

"Why not?"

"Oh! because they can't be—because they aren't made so. We, who are more fortunate, ought to be very



thankful ; but we should not deal hardly with our less happy sisters," replied Mrs. Seeley.

"I don't see it, Arabella. Any woman can be attractive, if she takes the trouble. But so many women never do."

"Do men?" asked Jack.

"Oh! yes; a man always takes the trouble to make himself attractive at least once in his life, and he nearly always succeeds if he goes on long enough. But some women seem to think that it is a man's duty to be fond of them; and so they make it, as is the custom in dealing with duty, as difficult and disagreeable as possible. Then, when men do not care for them, they blame the former and never themselves."

"Men always like to be amused and never to be instructed," remarked Jack; "if only women would remember this, all would yet be well."

"Ah, Captain, how wise you are!" exclaimed Arabella, rising from her seat and leaving the room.

Though a foolish woman, Mrs. Seeley was not without a certain amount of tact. Hence she was not altogether unpopular. There is always a niche in this world for a woman of tact—which is merely another name for observation and unselfishness.

When Jack found himself alone with Elfrida, he got up and began to play with the ornaments upon the chimney-piece. Although a brave man and a first-class soldier, he was afraid of Elfrida Harland. Nevertheless he did the very thing which frightened him; it was here that his pluck showed itself.

"Miss Harland, I have not yet fulfilled the peacemaking intention with which I came here," he began.

"Good intentions make an admirable pavement, but an uninteresting programme," Elfrida replied.

"Still I am going to use mine as a programme, and also

to carry it out. I want you to make friends with your sister."

"Ah!" Elfrida only answered by a monosyllable, and her face did not betray the slightest interest. It was a little difficult to continue in spite of such discouragement, but Jack went boldly on:

"She is so poor and so desolate, and so sadly in need of some one to look after her and take care of her. She seems such a young thing to have to fight her own way through the world."

"I see; and you think that I am old enough to take charge of her inexperienced youth. Did you never hear that twin sisters are generally pretty much of an age?"

"Not if they have had such different experiences as you two have had. Why, you are an accomplished woman of the world, while she is but a desolate child who has hitherto been cheated out of all life's pleasures."

Miss Harland smiled a cold, inscrutable smile. "My sister ought to be proud of such a loyal champion."

But Jack was now too full of Ethel's wrongs to be abashed by Elfrida's coldness.

"Oh! won't you go to her," he cried, "and be kind to her and help her? She has to work so hard for her living, poor little girl! And I am sure that her employers are not kind to her. She is so plucky and simple, and so good to her old grandparents, that you could not help loving her if you knew her!"

"Couldn't I? I am not so sure of that."

"Please don't be hard and cruel! As Mrs. Seeley says, you do yourself an injustice when you pretend to be as unfeeling as this. You must have a heart somewhere; and I am sure that that heart would break if you realized—too late—that you had spoilt the life of your twin sister"

"You flatter me. I am not sure that I have a heart

at all ; and if I have, it is of the unbreakable sort. Something like the unbreakable glass that you can throw about without hurting it."

"Still, connoisseurs prefer to drink out of the delicate sort that will break if roughly handled. But I believe that the kind you mention is most popular and economical on the tables of commercial inns and second-class boarding-houses," replied Jack grimly.

Elfrida's face flushed. "You are very rude !"

"I am very angry !"

Elfrida's heart began to beat quickly. A woman always admires a man when he is angry with her, provided that she knows he is in the right, and that he is not a relation.

There is something thrilling in a storm between two combatants of different sexes and different families ; but when the clashing thunder-clouds are members of the same household, the storm partakes of the nature of the teacup variety, and becomes a depressing comedy instead of a tragedy of delights.

"Captain Le Mesurier," said Elfrida, putting off for the moment her indifferent manner, "do not think more hardly of me than I deserve. There is a reason why I cannot go to my sister even if I would. Some day you may learn that reason, but not now."

Jack tugged at his moustache, as he always did when vexed. "I cannot imagine any reason that would be sufficiently powerful to come between two sisters, especially when the one was poor and in need, and the other had enough and to spare. Can't you see how hard it is for a young and beautiful girl to have to work for her living among people who are unkind to her, when her own sister is one of the greatest heiresses in London ?"

"I see all that, and I would help my sister if I could ; but, believe me, it is impossible."

"Impossible for you to go to your sister and tell her that she will always find a friend in you? Impossible for you even to write to her?"

"Under the circumstances, utterly impossible."

"I cannot believe it."

Elfrida shook her head. "You do not know all. If you did, you would see that Ethel and I are bound to remain apart."

"It is very hard on her!"

Elfrida smiled sadly. "Perhaps it is also a little hard on me, but what must be must be."

Jack had been walking about the room in his excitement, but now he stood still, and began playing again with the ornaments on the chimneypiece; and he played so hard with a little china dog, that one of its legs came off in his impatient fingers.

"I am afraid I have been guilty of impertinence in addressing you on this matter, and owe you an apology," he said stiffly.

But Elfrida rose and stood beside him, and put her hand on his arm. "Please don't be angry with me. If you knew the whole story, you would know it is not my fault that Ethel and I are so far apart. Perhaps you will know it some day, and then you will understand that I was powerless to bridge over the gulf between us. But in the meantime I ask you to take my word for what I have just told you, and to be friends with me. It may be that I need your friendship even more than Ethel does." And the sweet voice shook.

Jack Le Mesurier was not the man to refuse forgiveness to a pretty woman, whatever she might have done; so he took Miss Harland's hand, and shook it warmly.

"Of course I will be friends with you," he said, "and of course I am bound to believe a lady's word. There is no other course open to me."

## A Double Thread

"And you will forgive me for not acceding to your request?"

"Yes, but that doesn't mean that I shall never proffer it again. Good-bye."

"Good-bye; I am glad that you have forgiven me."

And Jack forgave her thus easily because she had looked at him with Ethel's eyes and spoken to him in Ethel's voice.

After he had gone, Elfrida picked up the china ornament that he had broken in the heat of his argument.

"Poor little dog," she said, fitting the broken limb into its place; then she smiled. "No, not poor little dog, but happy little dog! for it is better to be crushed to pieces by a strong man than to spend one's life as a drawing-room ornament. I believe that I envy you, little china dog, and that you are better off than I am after all."

Then she sat down and gazed into the fire and thought about Jack Le Mesurier.

"He is a real man," she said to herself, "but all the rest are puppets."

And she went on thinking about him until it was time to dress for dinner.

Elfrida did not attempt to disguise from herself that Jack was speedily becoming the centre of the universe to her; neither was she shy—as a more impulsive woman would have been—of the strength of her own feelings. For years she had wanted to fall in love, and had failed; now at last she had succeeded, and she was glad that she had done so, whatever the results might be.

Elfrida Harland had many theories of life, and one of them was that it is advisable, if difficult, for every woman to marry; but that it is absolutely necessary, and quite feasible, for every woman to fall in love. The most sympathetic woman in the world is the old maid who has been in love; the least the old maid who has not. The former reminds

one of dried rose-leaves and lavender; and the latter, of bread-and-butter which has been cut too long.

Knowing this, Elfrida was naturally anxious not to miss so important a branch of her education, and for some time past she had been afraid that she was fated to miss it, in spite of all her intentions to the contrary. But now that Jack had appeared upon the scene, she saw a new world opening out before her; and she began to understand how wise it is to be foolish, and how foolish it is to be wise.

To her sister, as a possible rival, she never gave a serious thought. She had reigned so supremely and so easily in her own world, that she was not on the look-out for opposing sovereigns; and it had never yet occurred to her to be jealous of anybody. It is only when we find other people attractive—or ourselves not so—that we learn what jealousy means, and Elfrida had come upon neither of these causes till she met Jack Le Mesurier.

When it was time to dress, she got up and looked at herself in the glass.

“I believe he is really beginning to care,” she mused. “If he were not, he wouldn’t have been so fearfully angry. Men are never angry unless they care; they are only cross and tiresome and disagreeable. Oh dear me! The summer is coming, and the world is not such a very dull place after all.”

Then her face grew grave as she added: “I wonder how long it will be before he finds out about poor Ethel.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### *GREYSTONE.*

“Your wisdom made me worn and old  
And sick of life beneath the sun ;  
But you passed onward, calm and cold,  
Unconscious of the harm you'd done  
By your crusade so strictly truthful  
Against enthusiasms youthful.”

**N**OT long after this, Jack received a letter which surprised him. It was from his uncle, Sir Roger, and ran as follows :—

“DEAR JACK,—I hear that you have come back home for a time. As you have crossed the sea between England and India, you may be able to bridge over the family feud as well ; though this will naturally prove a more difficult undertaking, blood being thicker than water, it is said. Nevertheless, come down to Greystone, and let us see if we hate each other as much as we ought to do.

“Yours truly,

“ROGER LE MESURIER.”

Of course Jack decided at once to accept his uncle's invitation. The old quarrel was so very old now that there was no life left in it, and the young man naturally longed to see the house which had been the home of his family for so many generations. Therefore he ran down to Greystone for what some people call “a week-end”—by which they mean a week's beginning.

The journey was not a long one, and Jack found it very pleasant, it was so delightful to him to see the old, neat, English scenery once more. Compared with England, all other countries are more or less untidy; for, in her most unguarded moments, she never has a hair out of place. Just now the country was looking specially inviting, as that soft, pink flush, which heralds the dawn of spring, was gradually stealing over the bare, brown woods; the fields were beginning to put on their new green dresses, and the birds were tuning-up for their coming concert.

As for the rooks, they were very busy with their building arrangements in the elm trees; and they kept hopping across the ground towards broken twigs, in that silly, coy way of theirs, as if they were dancing *Sir Roger de Coverley* instead of erecting homesteads for their wives and families. And everywhere there was that sense of promise in the air, which we always feel when spring is at the door; and which makes us believe that the summer which is coming will be a happier time than all the summers which have gone before.

Jack did not attempt to read during his journey; he merely looked out of the window and thought what a glorious thing spring was, and that there had never been such a spring as this one. And that was true, as far as he was concerned, for this was the first spring after he had met Ethel.

Once he caught a glimpse of the hunt in full cry across a breezy common; and the sight of the pink coats sent a thrill all through him. There is something very exhilarating to English people in a hunting-scene; it arouses the same sort of patriotic frenzy as is aroused by a royal procession, or a military band, or a fire-engine; and it is the sort of thrill that every man and woman is the better for feeling.

Jack alighted at a little roadside station about three miles



from Greystone, and was met by a very smart mail-phaeton, and a pair of most unmanageable horses. The driving of this neat turn-out gave him distinct pleasure; as the successful management of the unmanageable is a pastime which never fails to bring joy to the masculine heart.

His way lay along a charming old coach road, with broad grassy margins on either side—a road which had been made in the days of the Romans, when land was not yet sold at so much a yard, like ribbon or tape; and Jack drove along the straight white road at a tremendous rate, and felt that the world was very good.

Following the instructions of the groom, he went straight on for nearly three miles, and then turned—through a massive stone gateway surmounted with the arms of the Le Mesuriers—into a fine park, surrounded by a broad belt of woods, and skirted on one side by a wide river. The drive through the park was fully a mile long, and then they turned a sharp corner and came suddenly upon the house—as fine a specimen of a Tudor mansion as could be found in that part of the country.

Sir Roger Le Mesurier was a bachelor, and lived alone; but he never abated a jot or a tittle of the state which he thought incumbent upon the master of Greystone. The establishment and the gardens were as well kept up as if a large and hospitable family, instead of a lonely old man, were living at the hall. The state drawing-rooms were lighted up with countless wax candles every night. A new butler once, on being told to light up as usual, inquired what company was coming. "*I am coming,*" replied his master. For the future the butler decided to do as he was bid, and ask no questions—a not unwise decision for others than butlers.

Jack was ushered with due formality into his uncle's presence, and found that uncle the very opposite to everything that he had expected.

Sir Roger was a very small man with the face of a cherub, but of a cherub who, instead of docilely keeping within bounds, had strayed into uncherubic regions. His tongue was as bitter as his smile was bland; and while he enjoyed nothing so much as the saying of cruel things, he said them in a little piping voice which would have done credit to a white-robed choir-boy. He had read much, and seen still more; and he believed in nothing, not even in himself.

"How do you do, my dear boy?" he began in his shrill treble. "Welcome to Greystone."

Jack shook hands with him heartily, and said how pleased he was to see, for the first time in his life, the home of his people.

"You would have seen it long ago, if your dear father had not been so unconscionably conscientious. But he had scruples about something or other—I forget what; either he would not eat rice pudding on a Friday, or else he refused to marry without love—I am sure I forget which; and so your respected grandfather never forgave him, and cut him off with a shilling. Younger sons cannot afford to keep consciences, my good Jack. Believe me, in the long run it costs more to keep a conscience than to keep a pack of hounds, and doesn't give a fiftieth part as much pleasure."

Jack smiled somewhat grimly. "Even eldest sons do not always afford the luxury."

His uncle nodded appreciatively. "That is so; I never kept one myself. But that was not because I had not the money, but because I had not the conscience. Nevertheless, it has been a good thing for the estate; for a conscience in full working order, including extras, costs a man several thousands a year."

"I cannot agree with you there; for I have noticed that people with several thousands a year are not as a rule the people with consciences."

Sir Roger chuckled. "My dear boy, I stand corrected. As you say, consciences, like cottage-pianos and ornate funerals, are among the luxuries of the poor. Everything that costs much, and brings in nothing in return, throws a halo of respectability around its possessor which the world cannot gainsay."

Jack began tugging at his moustache. This bitter little angel of a man amused and yet depressed him.

"Sentiment is another luxury that is expensive," continued the baronet; "almost as expensive as conscientiousness, and your dear father indulged in that also, if my memory does not mislead me. He threw away a handsome fortune for the sake of a handsome face. I prefer a pretty woman to a plain one myself; but a hundred thousand pounds is a large sum to pay for the difference of a tenth part of an inch between two sets of eyelashes."

"I cannot remember my mother, sir," said Jack, rather stiffly.

"No; there I have the advantage of you. She was a lovely woman, and had the longest eyelashes I ever saw; but they were hardly worth a hundred thousand pounds—at least, some men would not have thought so."

"I suppose that my grandfather wanted his son to marry a rich woman," said Jack, who, in spite of himself, could not help feeling interested in these family histories.

"Naturally. He was an admirable man who had his children's highest interests at heart. But your dear father was unpracticable; and when the heiress to a hundred thousand pounds lost her heart to him, he declined to marry her because he said he didn't love her; as if the two had anything to do with each other!"

"And was that why my grandfather would not forgive him, and left him nothing but that beggarly shilling?"

"It was. I confess that my excellent father was somewhat severe in his dealings with his second son; but

poverty was the one sin that he found it impossible to forgive."

"Then why didn't you marry the heiress, sir?" asked Jack bluntly.

Sir Roger's laugh was as silvery as a girl's. "My dear boy, have you yet to learn that woman value men, as they value salmon, according to their size, and that husbands are bought and sold by weight? No woman will look at a little man while a big man is near; and I weighed eight stone to my brother's fourteen, and measured five-foot-two to his six-foot-three."

"I see."

"Consequently I never married. Of course I found plenty of charming and well-brought-up young women who were ready to sacrifice their own selfish inclinations in order to become Lady Le Mesurier and mistress of Greystone; but I did not care to be taken with the estate, as one of the least important fixtures. I have my faults, I admit, but altruism has never been one of them. However, now let us leave these interesting and romantic subjects, and have something to eat. You must be hungry after your journey."

After Jack had been duly refreshed, his uncle took him all over the house and gardens, and the more Jack saw of Greystone, the more delightful he thought it.

The two men dined together in the big dining-room, and were duly waited upon by powdered footmen, and feasted upon all the delicacies in, and out of, season. Sir Roger entertained his nephew with stories of his past life, and epigrams on his experiences therein. Jack marvelled at the wit and at the heartlessness of the little man; and listened, without being edified.

The next day was Sunday.

"I make it a rule to go to church on a Sunday morning," Sir Roger remarked at breakfast. "I consider it an

attention which is due from the squire to the parson. But to-day you shall go in my place."

"Certainly, sir," agreed Jack, helping himself to broiled kidneys.

"As long as there is a member of the family in the hall pew, it cannot signify to the rector who it is," continued the baronet.

"I suppose you think that one is as good as two?"

"Precisely. It is equally polite to the church, and less fatiguing to the individual."

Jack laughed. "What sort of a man is the rector?" he asked.

"An extremely clever man, who used to be the rector of a large London parish, till he nearly killed himself with overwork and came to Greystone for rest; yet one who is so primitive as to practise what he preaches, and to act up to his own convictions."

"I admire men who act up to their own convictions," remarked Jack doggedly.

His uncle smiled, as he poured out for himself a cup of tea. "Young people always do—it is one of the prerogatives of youth to believe in excellence, and one of its pastimes to strive to emulate it."

"How does he preach?" asked Jack.

"Capitally, in what I call the dictionarian style—that is to say, he adapts himself to his hearers and presupposes that his congregation are as ignorant of their dictionaries as they are of their Bibles; and he expounds to them the several meanings of simple words. I happen to possess a good dictionary, so his sermons don't appeal to me; but to any one who does not, I should imagine they would prove invaluable."

And then Sir Roger went on to set forth his views on preaching in general, which were amusing if not to be approved.

Jack duly went to the old church at Greystone and sat in a square pew with a fireplace in it, like a cosy little parlour, and looked out on the world—or rather, on the church—over the effigies of a Sir Lionel and Lady Le Mesurier, who had lived and loved and died before the Tudors began to reign in England. As he looked at the still stone faces, he wondered whether Sir Lionel had married for love or for lands, and whether “ Dame Eleanor, his wife,” had had long or short eyelashes. It did not matter now to Sir Lionel, Jack mused, as he looked at the old warrior in his age-long slumber, whether his marriage had brought fresh money to the coffers or fresh fields to the estate of Greystone; but even now it must matter to him—somewhere and somehow—if he sold his birthright of love for a mess of pottage, or if he made himself a better man for time and for eternity by choosing the best and letting the second-best go by.

As Jack sat in the quaint old pew, among the monuments of dead and gone Le Mesuriers, he threw off the paralysing effect of his uncle’s cultured sarcasm; and he felt that those sleeping ancestors of his must have had a nobler creed and a wider charity than he who now reigned at Greystone in their stead, or they would never have fought like heroes and lived like Englishmen, and have gone to their rest with that calm smile upon their carved faces. And he made up his mind that those brave, simple soldiers were worth a hundred of the sneering little cynic who now filled their place and bore their name, and that it was far better to follow in their footsteps than in his.

The rector preached an excellent sermon, which was food for the spiritual needs of his many poor parishioners, if also for the satire of his one rich one; and after the service was over he introduced himself to Jack, and took the young man into the rectory garden to see how the spring flowers were coming out.

"I am a bachelor, you know," he said, with his genial smile, that made strangers feel that they had known him intimately for years; "and I have only my flowers to make home home to me. So they have to be to me what wives and children are to happier men."

Jack duly admired the garden, so carefully tended, which surrounded the picturesque old rectory, and he and the rector then went on to talk of other things. Mr. Cartwright was a man with whom everybody liked to talk, because he minded the things of others more than his own. In fact he had nothing of his own worth calling so, save a packet of old letters and a memory—or rather a promise—of a love that death could not destroy. In his early youth he had loved a woman, and he had worked and waited for her for ten years. Then she died; and within a year of her death he was appointed vicar of a wealthy London church, and for the first time in his life was in a position to marry.

Since then he had become rector of Greystone, and had settled down alone in the quaint rectory, and now lived for, and among, his poor. He did not look back upon time past and cry "Too late"; but he looked forward to eternity and prayed "How long?"

When Jack left the rectory he returned to the hall to lunch, and he spent the afternoon in wandering at will all over the estate. He could not help feeling proud to think that his forefathers had walked over these same fields for so many generations; nor could he stifle a wish that—although the entail was now cut off—his uncle would leave the estate to him, the only other representative of that branch of the family.

The longing to possess land is strong in every Englishman's heart; and when a man's forefathers have possessed the land before him, the longing grows into a passion, and will not be put to silence. So it was with Jack.

After dinner, when the two men were sitting over their wine, Sir Roger suddenly said : " There is something that I have to say to you, Jack, and I have sent for you down from London on purpose that you may hear it."

Jack listened attentively while his uncle went on :

" As you are doubtless aware, the property is not entailed, and I can leave it as I wish."

" Yes, I know."

" The title, of course, must come to you, and I made up my mind some time ago that the estate should go with the title, if you happened to be the sort of man that I approve of. Therefore I sent for you, ' on appro.,' as the shopkeepers say."

Jack's heart beat very fast. He wanted Greystone more than anything else in the world—except Ethel ; and a man cannot hear his heart's desire being bandied about within his grasp, without experiencing some sort of emotion ; at least, not a man under thirty.

Sir Roger continued : " I like you ; I like you extremely. In fact, you do not possess any one of the virtues to which I most object. So I have decided to make you my heir."

Jack wanted to say something very effective, he was feeling so much ; but all that he succeeded in uttering was, " I say, I'm awfully obliged to you."

His uncle stopped him with a wave of his small white hand.

" Do not thank me, my dear boy, till you hear the only condition that I shall make. You should never thank people for anything until you know their motives in giving it ; when you have learnt these, the desire to give thanks is usually no more."

" May I ask what stipulation you think necessary ?" asked Jack, and so intense was his excitement that his voice shook.

" Certainly, my dear boy, certainly. I have decided



to leave Greystone to you, with whatever money I may happen to have in hand at the time, on condition that you will marry a lady of fortune. If you find yourself unable to oblige me in this respect, I shall leave all my property to the Irish branch of the family."

There was a moment's silence. Jack's heart had suddenly sunk into his boots, and his face looked white and drawn.

"I shall now leave the matter entirely in your hands," added Sir Roger airily, "and you must please yourself. If you don't happen to be in love with anybody, you can easily fall in love with a rich girl; if you happen to be in love with a girl who isn't rich—well, you can still marry one who is."

"Love cannot be controlled in that way," said Jack angrily.

"Indeed. Why not?"

Jack got up from his chair and walked about the room, while his uncle regarded him with mild amusement.

"All men," continued the latter, "begin life by imagining themselves heroes endowed with exceptional genius, and they expect the world to regard them as such. The world naturally does no such thing. When the world fails them in this respect, they recognize the necessity of appointing some one to fulfil the obvious and neglected duty of offering them the adoration and submission which is merely their due. It is this feeling which induces them to marry, and for lack of a better name they call it love."

Still Jack did not speak. He was struggling against a wave of helpless anger, and its helplessness overwhelmed him.

His uncle smiled. "For my part I fail to see why the incense offered by a beggar-maid is more subtle in its flattery, or more soothing in its effect, than that sprinkled by an heiress. The rich and the poor are equally devout

worshippers, I believe ; but the difference between them is shown when it is time for the collection. And it is always time for the collection in the temple of Mammon."

"I think it is vile to make love to a woman just because she is rich !"

"Most unwise, my dear boy ; it is merely an excellent reason for marrying her. Love in a cottage is doubtless a most delightful arrangement in springtime ; but for the winter one requires more substantial comforts."

"According to poets, where love is it is always spring," said Jack, somewhat grandiloquently.

"Precisely ; and where poverty is it is generally Lent," added his uncle. "But let us go into the drawing-room and finish our pleasant little chat there. It feels warmer there than here, and it is wintertime with me, you know, though you are still springlike—one might almost say, green."

So they walked through the oak-panelled hall into the state drawing-room ; and for the moment Jack felt as if he hated all the fine things which were being heaped into the scales in order to weigh down Ethel.

"Love-making, my dear boy," continued the baronet in his silvery voice, "is doubtless a most agreeable pastime. But marriage is a remunerative profession. When love-making ceases to be agreeable, and marriage to be remunerative, their *raison d'être* is gone."

Jack longed to defy the old man, and to tell him to his face that his philosophy of life was a lie ; but somehow his uncle's cool contempt took all the spirit out of him, and left him like a whipped schoolboy.

"Some men," mused Sir Roger, "make love to a woman because they think her the most attractive woman in the world ; others make love to her merely because she happens to be the most attractive woman in the room. I often wonder if the woman knows the difference between the two brands. I should doubt it."

"I daresay you think me an ass, but to me love is the most sacred thing in the world, and so I cannot make fun of it, or treat it lightly."

Sir Roger laughed softly to himself as he warmed his hands, which were as small and delicate as a girl's, over the huge wood fire. "My dear boy, how deliciously elementary of you! How picturesquely prehistoric! I felt exactly like that myself when I was your age, but Time—and a woman—taught me my mistake."

Jack looked at his uncle curiously: so there had been a woman in the old cynic's story after all. "If one woman is heartless, it doesn't prove that all the rest are," he said.

"Logically, perhaps not; but you will find that when you have proved to a demonstration the shallowness and fickleness of one particular woman, your zeal in making further investigations into the interesting subject will have considerably cooled. It is not to the burnt child that we must look for discoveries as to the development of the steam-engine."

"I suppose not."

"In selecting a wife I must leave you to please yourself entirely," continued Sir Roger with much generosity; "as long as she has a fortune sufficient to keep up Greystone the length of her eyelashes is immaterial. I would dissuade you from marrying a dull woman, if you can help it; dulness being the only unpardonable sin in the nineteenth century. Nowadays it is provincial for a woman to be dull."

"I hate dull women as much as you do, sir."

Jack felt himself so completely at the mercy of this bland and bitter little man that he was becoming weakly irritable.

His uncle smiled. "Hardly as much as I do, my dear Jack: you haven't it in you to hate as I can. I would also discourage you from selecting the plain housekeeping

species; those dreary, domestic animals who think that when they know how long a tablecloth ought to keep clean, and what are the proper wages for a kitchen-maid, they have learnt all that the wisdom of the centuries is capable of teaching a woman. This, however, is a matter of taste, and I am merely offering advice—not issuing commands; but let there be no mistake about the money. I have lived extravagantly and spent more than I ought; so that, unless you marry a fortune, you could never afford to live at Greystone even if you had the chance, and I should see that you never did have the chance. Now let us change the subject; talking about the same thing for long is always tiresome, and this particular subject does not appear to act either as a stimulant to your wit or a soporific to your temper. But before we finally leave it, allow me to remark in passing that a little bird has told me that the late Lord Harland's heiress is not indifferent to your attentions."

Jack pulled his moustache without speaking. What was the good of arguing with this childlike demon?

"Elfrida Harland," murmured the old man, half to himself, "has close upon fifteen thousand a year. Her eyelashes, I hear, are as long as any man could desire; and her tongue, perhaps, a little longer."

## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE PINK DIAMOND.*

“But as for myself, I have piped so long  
The jangling refrains of the market-place,  
That now I am deaf to the seraph-song  
Which is floating for ever through fields of space.”

THE late Lady Harland was the daughter of Lord Langstone, and brought her husband no fortune save such prestige as her rank conferred upon him, and a wonderful pink diamond that she had inherited from an aunt.

This diamond had originally been brought from India; and strange tales were told of its magic properties. It was said that if any woman gave it to the man she loved, that man was bound to love her, and her only, till his dying day; and it was whispered that more than one favourite wife—on her way to her Sutte—had given the pink diamond to daughter or friend, praying that it might bring to the latter, as it had brought to her, the unchangeable love of her lord and master.

The beautiful Emilia Langstone had received this stone from her father's brother, who had spent his life in India, and had left his heart there in the grave of a lovely native princess, the giver to him of the pink diamond.

Emilia, in her turn, presented the stone to a sailor lover, and waited for long years till he should come home and claim her. At last he came, having made a fortune in the

West Indies ; but not until her hair was grey and her beauty faded. Then they married, and lived happily together for as much of life as was still left to them. When the old sailor died, his widow survived him by only three months ; for he had been her devoted lover to the end, and she found the world too cold to live in now that he was gone. She left the diamond to her niece Alethea.

Alethea Langstone was not as beautiful as her aunt had been ; but she possessed great distinction of manner and carriage, and was an undoubtedly handsome young woman. As was natural, having no money herself, she fell madly in love with a penniless young subaltern. He was a distant cousin, and once spent his leave at Langstone Hall ; and he and Alethea had a most delightful winter together, riding to hounds and making love to each other.

Of course they knew that they should have to wait for many years ; but they were so much in love that they laughed at time and space. Alethea spent all her pocket-money in having the pink diamond set in a ring for Claude ; and with that magic charm upon his finger he would be true to her, she knew, to the death. Her trust in the stone was not misplaced ; for on the very day after she gave it to him he broke his neck in the hunting-field, and she drew the newly-made ring from off the dead boy's hand. At first she thought that her heart was broken ; and to a certain extent it was ; but in time it was patched up sufficiently to enable her to marry that rising lawyer, Sir George (afterwards Lord) Harland, and to help him to make his way with her in society, as well as he had made it in the world without her.

So she did not die at seventeen of a broken heart ; but at seventy, from the combined effects of too much luxury and too little love.

Lady Harland left the pink diamond to her granddaughter, Elfrida, having duly informed the latter of the

magic properties pertaining to the stone. It was now kept at the bank, with the rest of the deceased peeress's jewels, as Elfrida had more than enough jewellery of her own for the wear of an unmarried woman; but Miss Harland was extremely proud of possessing a gem which was celebrated on account of its supposed supernatural powers, and she would have regretted the loss of this one stone more than that of any other of her possessions.

As the weeks rolled on, Elfrida felt herself caring for Jack more and more. She did not show this in the least by her manner. She still wore the mask of clever coldness which had slipped off for a moment when she spoke to him about Ethel, and had been so quickly replaced; but Jack could not help remembering that it had once slipped off, and had shown him that she was not as heartless as she pretended to be. He also could not help remembering his uncle's words as to Elfrida's reputed liking for him, and how much that liking might mean.

Poor Jack was not in a happy mood just then; he was torn by conflicting emotions, which is a most exhausting form of exercise. On the one hand were Elfrida and Greystone, and an enormous fortune; and on the other were Ethel and India, and a moderate pension after his full time was served and his health probably ruined; and Jack was conscious that if he had not fallen in love with Ethel he would in all probability have fallen in love with Elfrida.

Still, the fact remained that he had fallen in love with Ethel, and, what is more, had practically told her so; and Jack was a gentleman. The fact also remained that Ethel needed some one to fight her battles for her, and Elfrida did not; and Jack was a soldier. Thirdly, it happened that Elfrida said disagreeable things, and Ethel did not; and Jack was a man.

He wrote to Ethel, as he said he would, from time to time; and she answered him, according to her promise.

But all his letters were sent to Sunnydale to be forwarded, and she never put any address upon hers. Jack could not help feeling that this secrecy as to her place of residence was rather strange, and especially so when coupled with Elfrida's mysterious hints as to the impassable gulf fixed between the twin sisters; but he possessed in rare measure that most excellent gift of perfect loyalty to his friends, so he strangled any doubts about the woman he loved before ever they saw the light.

Of course he could not prove that his perfect trust in Ethel was not misplaced, but he knew it all the same. It is not always the facts that can be demonstrated of which we are the most sure.

Again and again Jack introduced Ethel's name into his conversations with her sister, but never with any marked success. If possible, Elfrida changed the subject; and, if not, she merely repeated her statement that it was utterly out of her power to establish intimate relations between herself and her sister, and declined to say any more.

Jack—with characteristic loyalty—tried to believe in Elfrida as well as in Ethel; but this proved to be a miracle beyond the power of his faith; faith in this case not being seconded by charity, which is only another name for love. He could not imagine any reason which would justify such cold indifference and such callous selfishness on the part of the wealthy Miss Harland; yet she had assured him over and over again, with every profession of sincerity, that there was an insurmountable barrier between the twins which made it utterly impossible for her to see Ethel, or even to send her some share of her own abundant wealth.

It was no wonder that Jack was puzzled. A cleverer man than he would have found it an enigma not easy to solve.

He and Elfrida did not see each other very frequently;



but, in spite of the growing distrust of her in his heart, he could not help feeling to some extent her power of fascination. Although she and Ethel were in some respects so different—the one being so studied and the other so spontaneous—they possessed the same personal charm; and the likeness between them was so strong that now and then Jack almost loved Elfrida for Ethel's sake; while at other times—that is to say, when the former was specially sarcastic and cynical—this very likeness irritated and annoyed him.

But it is dangerous work for a woman when a man talks to her because she happens to remind him of her sister. Sometimes it is also dangerous work for the man.

“Do you see much of Captain Le Mesurier?” asked Lady Silverhampton one day when Elfrida was lunching with her.

“I see him now and then, but not very often. It is difficult to see anybody often in London.”

“Unless you want to, and then you can see them every day and twice on Sundays.”

“How do you manage the twice on Sundays?” Elfrida asked.

“By going to the same church as they do in the morning, and by letting them cal' upon you in the afternoon, of course. I remember being frightfully in love with a man before I met Silverhampton. I forget his name, but it was something that began with *H* and ended with *ton*—Haddington?—Harrington?—Hamilton! What was the man's name? I shall forget my own name next!” And her ladyship indulged in that exhausting hunt after a lost name which is one of the most fatiguing forms of mental research.

“Only his name never was yours, you see,” added Elfrida; “and thereby hangs a tale.”

But Lady Silverhampton did not hear. She was repeating

to herself a string of names beginning with *H* and ending with *son*.

"I know what it was," she suddenly cried, with a *Eureka* smile on her face; "it was Addison. I really was frightfully in love with him. It used to give me a regular thrill when I heard him blow his nose in church. Ah! here is Stonebridge," she added, rising to greet her guest. "How do you do? I am so glad to get you and Elfrida gathered together round my hospitable board; you are such dear, amusing people."

"I am very pleased that our conversation amuses you, my lady."

"It doesn't. It is my conversation that amuses you, and that is why I like you so much. Silverhampton is an old darling, and admires me enormously; but he doesn't really appreciate me. He has no idea that I am most serious when I am funny, and most funny when I am serious."

"But married life with a person who thoroughly understood one might be difficult?" suggested Lord Stonebridge.

"Difficult? It would be absolutely impossible. As I have just pointed out to you, we like best the people who appreciate our jokes; but we love best the people who believe our fibs. Silverhampton believes every one of mine, the old dear! And he gets plenty of practice."

"Begin making jokes," said Lord Stonebridge, seating himself at the luncheon-table, "and Miss Harland and I will hold our sides to your heart's content, we promise you."

"I can't make jokes before I've finished my lunch. My wit is all of the p.m. variety, and never scintillates in the morning. Making jokes before lunch is as bad as making love before lunch; and they are both as bad as going to the play in the afternoon."

"Lots of people do make love before lunch," said Elfrida.  
"I see them in Kensington Gardens."

"Not well-to-do people. Nobody with over a hundred a year makes love before lunch-time. You may take this as an axiom, and safely refuse all the early birds."

"I suppose the explanation is that no one who can afford it is awake before lunch-time. It is only the poor who desecrate the stillness of the morning hours by work," Lord Stonebridge suggested.

Lady Silverhampton shook her head. "That is no explanation, but rather the reverse. It is not when one is most wideawake that one makes love, you know. You are not up to your usual form this morning."

"I haven't had my lunch."

"What are you going to do when you have had it?"

"Talk to you—I beg your pardon, I mean listen while you talk to me—till you are tired of me; and then go forth to pay some duty-calls."

"Oh! don't waste your time in doing your duty; it is as reckless as wasting your money in paying your debts. I never do either."

"Besides," said Elfrida, "you are always so sorry afterwards. Our good deeds, unfortunately, are as irrevocable as our evil ones; and while we frequently regret it when we have done wrong, we invariably regret it when we have done right."

Lady Silverhampton nodded. "I know; your conscience only purrs for about an hour, and then you wake up to the consciousness that you've had no fun and nothing to show for it. Only last week I went to see Mrs. Gardiner, who is ill, instead of going to Maud Greenway's party; and I found out afterwards that Mrs. Gardiner said I'd talked so much I'd made her worse, while Maud's party was the smartest thing of the season. It seems to me that unselfishness pleases nobody, while selfishness at any rate pleases yourself."

Elfrida laughed. "Do you remember poor Mr. Featherdew,

who was so unselfish and good and yet could never get any girl to dance with him? He was wounded to the quick when all the women cut him, and he couldn't make it out. At last he discovered that he had the reputation of being so unselfish that he always danced with the ugliest girls in the room. No man could outlive such a reputation as that, so he left town."

"What a nice moral story!" said Lord Stonebridge; "I'm so thankful to remember that I have never been unselfish. I always dance with and talk to the women that I admire; and leave the other women—like the pounds—to take care of themselves."

"I hate a man who is unselfish," said Elfrida, "just as I hate a man who sings falsetto. They are both poor imitations of a woman, I think."

Lady Silverhampton shrugged her shoulders. "What an unmarried remark! A selfish man is like a picture by Hogarth—very characteristic but horrid to live with. You are as silly as the inexperienced bachelors who say they like a woman with spirit, by which they mean temper; and that is the sort of spirit that quickly gets into hot water, as they learn when they are married."

"But you have just been sticking up for selfishness," remonstrated Miss Harland. "Only half a minute ago."

"Not in a husband, stupid! In myself. Can't you see the difference? Selfishness is like a bass voice or a chemical works—a source of pleasure and profit to the possessor, and a nuisance to everybody else. Never marry a selfish man, whatever you do: a conscientious one even would be better, though conscientious people are difficult enough to manage, goodness knows! They always think that what pleases them is not right, and that what pleases other people is absolutely wrong; and that is so tiresome for everybody."

"Very boring," murmured Lord Stonebridge.

After lunch was over, Lady Silverhampton said: "Now you two must amuse one another for half an hour, while I answer some frightfully important letters that I've forgotten for the last week; and then I'll take you both for a drive in the Park, if you are good."

So her ladyship bustled off to perform her deferred epistolary duties, and left her two guests in the library to entertain each other. As is inevitable when one of a trio leaves a room, the two began to talk about the third.

"Isn't she charming?" Miss Harland began.

"She is the most charming woman in London," replied Lord Stonebridge, who had been in love with Lady Silverhampton in her youth, and was consequently not bored by her middle-aged friendship.

"She never makes any demands upon her friends," said Elfrida; "that is why she is so delightful. Most people expect you to be fond of them or interested in them or something; and all that is such a nuisance. Now Evelyn never expects anything from anybody."

"And consequently gets everything from everybody," Lord Stonebridge added.

"Hardly that, I think; but still she is a dear woman, and never allows one to feel for a moment that it is one's duty to be fond of her. If she did, her charm would be gone."

"Affection is a recreation—not a profession."

"Of course it is. But how many people seem to think that disliking them is on a par with receiving stolen goods, or breaking the Sabbath! Now Evelyn never asks anything of her friends except that they shall laugh at her jokes; she says she doesn't even mind if they don't listen, provided that they laugh in the right places."

"She is certainly the least exacting woman I ever met."

"Exacting women are a terrible nuisance," remarked Elfrida; "they expect the impossible, and are in con-

sequence disappointed every time that the inevitable occurs. And the inevitable has a habit of occurring pretty often."

"It would be terrible to marry an exacting woman, don't you think?—one of those exhausting creatures who expect a man to forego his very dinner for the sake of talking to them," said Lord Stonebridge, who had imagined that his heart was broken when Evelyn Murray refused him twenty years ago, and had by now almost forgotten the incident.

"Then don't you believe in the old-fashioned sort of love that one reads about in story-books?"

"Good gracious, no!" replied Stonebridge, who had once fancied that he should die because Evelyn Murray became Lady Silverhampton. "I do not mean to say that affection is not a very comfortable thing; but to pretend that it is a matter of life and death is simple folly, don't you know?"

Elfrida sighed. "I suppose the days are over when men fought to the death to win their lady-loves."

"Over! I don't believe they ever existed save in the brains of poets and schoolgirls," laughed Stonebridge, completely forgetting that he had once sworn he would shoot Silverhampton through the head, even if he had to swing for it.

"Still it was a pretty idea."

"I don't agree with you, Miss Harland. I think a comfortable, everyday affection is twenty times better than that feverish sort of nonsense which poetasters invented and then advertized. Love, after all, is but the completion and apotheosis of a long and tried friendship," argued the man, who had fallen in love with Evelyn Murray the first time he saw her, and proposed to her the second. But that was more than twenty years ago, which makes all the difference. "The best sort of wife for a man is a woman

whose friendship he has enjoyed for years, and who knows all his tastes and all the ins-and-outs of his life; whose friends are his friends, and whose pleasures are his pleasures."

Elfrida shrugged her shoulders. Lord Stonebridge's ideal seemed rather dull to her; but twenty-five and forty-five look at things so differently.

"Believe me," his lordship continued, "that a sincere and abiding friendship between husband and wife is the only permanent foundation for happiness; and this is the reason why I venture to ask you to unite your lot with mine. I do not pretend to feel the sort of rapture that exists only in fairy tales; you would laugh at me if I did. But I can honestly say that I have a very sincere and deep affection for you, and that I believe I can make you happy. We know the same people—we are in the same set—we enjoy the same things; therefore there is every reason to suppose that our life together would run smoothly and pleasantly."

But Elfrida shook her head. She was as yet too young to be satisfied with smoothness and pleasantness. Easy roads are not attractive to those who would fain mount up on wings as eagles.

"I don't think it would do," she said.

"But why not? It seems to me most suitable from every point of view. You are a woman specially formed to adorn a high position, and my title and family are old; you are intolerant of sentimental absurdity, and I am the most practical of men; you have no romantic ideals, and I have outgrown mine; and, finally, the dread of your existence is to be bored, and I flatter myself I never bored a woman yet."

"Nevertheless, it wouldn't do."

"But it would do, my dear Miss Harland; believe me it would. As long as two persons are of one mind as to

what is true humour and what is bad form, they are bound to be happy together; and we have never disagreed on either of these points yet."

"That is so, I admit."

"Then where does the difficulty lie? There is a difference in age, I admit; but only about twenty years, and it is on the right side."

"Oh! it isn't the age," Elfrida admitted; "I hate boys. But all the same I feel it would be a mistake."

Lord Stonebridge smiled. "When one is young one is too much afraid of making mistakes; that is the reason why youth is the season when the majority of mistakes are made. Now tell me what is your objection to me."

"My dear Lord Stonebridge, the fact that a woman doesn't object to a man is hardly sufficient reason for marrying him. Would you choose a residence simply because there was not a coalpit under the drawing-room window, or a railway running through the gardens?"

But Lord Stonebridge was not to be put off. "Perhaps I am too old and stiff to make love easily enough to please you?"

"No; the man who makes love easily does not make it at all."

"Then am I to understand that you persist in saying No?"

"I persist in saying a most emphatic No."

Now Lord Stonebridge was one of those men who confine their common sense to their love affairs and their sentiment to their business transactions. In his youth he had been, of course, different; but at this tide in his affairs he was most practical with regard to all matters pertaining to the affections, while in questions of private finance or public legislation he was as romantic as any schoolgirl. He would show a sensitiveness of perception and a refinement of touch in dealing with a County Council,



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which he would never have dreamed of wasting upon any mere woman; and once, when he inadvertently interfered with a right-of-way across his estate, and agitating rate-payers had written letters to the local papers about it, his heart was much nearer to the breaking point than it had ever been in the days when Evelyn Murray reigned therein. Unfortunately for women—and fortunately for County Councils—this type of man is not rare in England.

After a moment's silence his lordship remarked: "I suppose this will make no difference to our friendship."

"I hope not," replied Elfrida cordially.

"And will you continue to be friends with me, even if you marry another man?" he persisted.

"That will depend on the other man."

"Do you mean to say that if you were married you would leave off writing to me and letting me come and see you?"

"Again I must refer you to the other man."

"But, my dear Miss Harland, that is absurd. It would be ridiculous for any man to make an objection to a friendship of such long standing as ours.

"Of course it would; but I shall do what the other man wants, even when it is ridiculous; that is what will make life so delightful to the other man."

And Lord Stonebridge had to be content with this. Miss Harland also was content, not knowing that the other man had even then left London, and was on his way to Silverhampton, a manufacturing town in the Midlands, to visit an old maiden aunt of his mother who lived there. He was doing all he could to make the time pass quickly between the Christmas and the Easter holidays, for that intervening space was a vacuum of the kind which nature, and especially human nature, abhors; as everybody can understand who has learnt that winter and summer, spring and autumn, do not depend upon any fixed arrangement

between the sun and the earth, as scientists ignorantly imagine, but upon the coming and going of one particular person. And as this particular person is a different one in each particular instance, all the world's summers and winters are not contemporaneous ; as is shown in the case of England and Australia, for example, and in innumerable others not so far apart.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *SILVERHAMPTON.*

“You never would turn your eyes to the ground  
From the heaven-sent vision they once had seen ;  
So ready and waiting will you be found  
When the angels bring you your might-have-been.”

**I**N the very middle of the Midlands there is a manufacturing town situated on the crest of a hill and crowned by a beautiful old church. In the churchyard stands a strange pillar, the origin whereof is lost in antiquity—it may be the shaft of an early Christian cross, or it may be the remains of a Druidical temple ; and just outside the lych-gates is the King’s Square, with its wide pavements and quaint old shops—shops which have remained in the same families of worthy burgesses from generation to generation. The streets slope away from the square, and gradually die away into the country, which is bounded by a distant rim of low blue hills. Such is the town of Silverhampton.

The staple commodity of the citizens of this place is iron, which they manufacture and buy and sell ; and the iron gets into their blood, and makes strong men of them. Sometimes it happens that the iron turns into gold, which is good ; but the danger is that this may get into their blood too, and so cause them to lose their sense of perspective in this world, and their view of the next altogether.

If from this town a traveller walks towards the sun-rising, he will soon find himself in a very Inferno of both blazing

and burnt-out blast-furnaces, deep dark pits, and weird heaps of cooling slag which look like the remains of some giant oyster feast ; but if he turns his steps Westward-ho, he will come to a delightful land of meadows and orchards and elm-studded parks, and pretty villages clustering round square-towered churches. He will find no majestic mountains, no rushing rivers ; but little brown streams, which creep singing through the fields, and mossy banks carpeted with primroses and bluebells in their season. In the spring a snowstorm of damson-blossom covers the country-side ; and in the summer the hedges are festooned first with white may, and then with pink dog-roses. There are straight white roads and narrow winding lanes, all leading to pleasant places ; and the rose-campions and dandelions grow on either side of the highways and the byways, so that these have red and gold edges like hymn-books. The hymns that are sung there by the larks and the thrushes and the cuckoos are the sweetest in the world. There is less rain there than in most English towns, and the sea is as far off as it can go from dwellers on this island ; but the east wind makes himself thoroughly at home in Silverhampton, and gives health and strength to the natives, while he cuts the throats of all the strangers within their gates.

People who have never been there think scorn of it, and call it the Black Country ; but Camilla Desmond loved every stone of the place, and called it home.

When Jack Le Mesurier went down to stay at Silverhampton, Miss Desmond, his mother's aunt, was a very old lady. She had been a beauty in her day, though that day had long since gone by ; and she still ranked as a queen in Silverhampton. She knew exactly who was who, a branch of knowledge never completely mastered by any one who has not been born and bred in a place, her mind being an infallible table of precedence of the inhabitants of her native town.

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Some of her neighbours raised themselves by their own exertions to rank and fortune, and still continued to identify themselves with the town which had made them what they were, and endeavoured thus to show their gratitude to it; these Miss Desmond invited to the most select of her always select parties, and enjoyed their triumph as if it were her own. Others of her neighbours also raised themselves to the occupation of high places, and then so completely turned their backs upon Silverhampton and the commerce which had enriched them, that they could hardly have found the place on the map if they had been asked to do so: at these Miss Camilla laughed with delicate humour and fine scorn.

"The art of forgetting," she said, "is a vulgar accomplishment. Well-bred people remember everything and are ashamed of nothing."

A friend was once talking to her about a man of great wealth and snobbish proclivities, and about all the luxuries which he could afford. "My dear," she rejoined, "no man is rich enough to please me who cannot afford to tell the truth."

Camilla Desmond lived alone in a square, red-brick house, which was called the Deanery, in memory of the time when Silverhampton boasted a Dean of its own, and provided him with a local habitation. This house was panelled throughout with black oak, and boasted one of the finest carved staircases in the county. Her father, as his father before him, had been a solicitor of the old school, a very stately and handsome man, who knew all the county families round about, and likewise all their secrets; and his beautiful daughter was often invited to accompany him when he visited the various noblemen and gentry in the neighbourhood. So Camilla knew the county as well as the town, and could hold her own with anybody.

When Jack arrived at Silverhampton, Miss Desmond gave

him a warm welcome for his mother's sake ; and, moreover, she was the type of woman who always thinks it worth while to make herself attractive to a man, be the man only a great-nephew. There is a story told of a celebrated beauty who, when she was over eighty, was asked at what age a woman leaves off flirting. "I cannot tell you," answered the lady, "you must ask somebody older than I am." Though Miss Camilla had only flirted in a regal style, she had never left off flirting (who ever does that has once begun it?) ; so now, in a dignified and grandmotherly way, she flirted with Jack. And she did it with such success, being a past-mistress in the art, that Jack fell in love with her at once, and confided to her the story of his love for Ethel Harland, and also the unpleasant and mercenary suggestions made by Sir Roger Le Mesurier.

Miss Camilla was intensely interested in the whole romance. What woman, worthy of the name, is not intensely interested in a love-story? A woman who is not interested in a love-story is almost as bad as a woman who is not fond of children, and they are both as bad as dragons and dodos, and quite as fictitious ; for, in spite of their protestations to the contrary, such creatures do not really exist. They only pretend that they do. Sometimes men are stupid enough to be taken in by this make-believe, and to dislike them accordingly ; but their sister-women are never so blind.

When Jack had finished his tale, Miss Desmond said : "My dear, as you have done me the honour to tell me your love-story, I in return will tell you mine. Though the difference between the two is the difference of half a century, one may yet throw some light for the future guidance of the other."

"Thank you," replied Jack. They were sitting in the oak-panelled drawing-room, and had drawn their chairs close to the fire, which was made up of such glowing coal

as can only be found in Mershire; for it was early spring, and the east wind was holding his usual Mid-Lent carnival in Silverhampton.

"It is rather a long story, but I think it will interest you, though Fate has never written *Finis* and made it end happily, as happens to most women's stories. But remember, Jack, that if a story does not end happily, it does not end at all: Fate leaves off meddling with it, and Heaven writes, *To be continued*," said Miss Desmond, drawing herself up in her stiff armchair. She was one of the women who never loll or lean back; those with very handsome figures seldom do.

"I was considered a beauty in my young days," she continued, "and had a long list of lovers; but I never cared for any of them save one—a pupil in my father's office. He was poor and of obscure parentage, but nevertheless a young man of extraordinary parts. His name was George Harland."

Jack uttered an exclamation of surprise, and felt, as we all sometimes feel, how small the world is and how very round.

"My people opposed the union with extreme severity," Miss Camilla went on; "but how could I help loving the finest man—taking him all round—that I had ever seen? And, having once loved him, how could I, being but an ordinary woman, ever stop loving him this side the grave, whatever he might do or leave undone? A woman's heart should enthrone her lover as a king—not take him in as a lodger; and we do not give monarchs notice to quit if they do not always happen to obey us. At least they did not in my young days, though in these democratic times I suppose they would; but the world was not democratic, I am thankful to say, when I was a girl. Democracy came in with chignons and steam-engines, after my youth was over."

Jack smiled, but he did not speak. This old-world lady,

in her old-world room, had a strangely soothing effect upon him; and her sweet, droning voice acted like a spell which he was afraid to break. Besides, Miss Camilla did not require him to make any passing comments on her story, as a more self-conscious woman would have done. She had been admired all her life; and women who are accustomed to admiration do not seek encouragement—they merely demand the attention which they are bound to receive.

Miss Desmond went on dreamily, her eyes on the fire and her thoughts in the past: "In time I overcame all the opposition to which I was subjected, and became engaged to George Harland. I had no doubt from the very first that he would make a name for himself. And it would have been the same to me if he had not. I only cared to be with him; whether it should be in fame or in obscurity—in opulence or in poverty—was a consideration which did not enter into my counsels. But it happened that George justified my faith in his powers. After all, the people who love us best know us best, for they alone see the perfect statue which is hidden in the shapeless block of our unformed character."

"You are quite right there."

"In the handsome boy at work in my father's office I recognized the future Lord Chancellor. But it took the world over forty years to see as much as that."

"Naturally," agreed Jack; "the world is neither quick nor deep in its perceptions."

"In those days it was not as easy as it is now to step from one branch of the legal profession to the other; but I was content to wait for George, however long it might be. I am one of the old-fashioned people who cannot approve of the modern custom of marrying late in life for a home, as if marriage were nothing but a sort of old age pension; it seems to me as bad as putting off all preparation



for the next world till this world has thrown us on one side as useless. In fact, it is worse as far as we are concerned ; for the love of God can stand any strain, but the love of man can not."

Jack nodded.

"But I had no scruples on this score as far as it affected George Harland ; for I had loved him in the hey-day of my youth, as I love him now, when he is dead of old age and I ought to be. There is only one real love in a life, and to me there never was any man in the world except George."

"Do you really believe that everybody has only one love, Aunt Camilla ?"

"Of course I do, my dear, just as I believe that everybody has only one pair of eyes and hands and feet. If they have more, they have only artificial ones."

Jack puffed at his pipe thoughtfully. Miss Desmond had been all her life too much of a man's woman not to let a man smoke when and where he wanted to. It was of much more consequence to her that men should find her attractive than that her rooms should be free from the odour of tobacco ; in her opinion the absence of tobacco smoke did not make up for the absence of masculine admiration—and the two are generally inseparable.

After a moment's silence the old lady went on :

"As you know, George Harland rose to the top of the tree in his profession ; he went into Parliament, and became Attorney-General, and finally Lord Chancellor. But long before this he had discovered that his career would be spoiled by a union with the daughter of a professional man ; so he married the daughter of a peer instead."

"Then he was a cad," exclaimed Jack angrily ; "an out-and-out cad !"

"My dear, I cannot allow any one to speak disrespectfully of Lord Harland in my presence," replied Miss

Camilla severely ; "he will always be the one man in all the world to me, and there is no doubt that he was the greatest lawyer of his day. If a woman has the honour of calling a famous man her lover, she must pay the price for such a distinction ; it is childish to fall in love with a king and expect him to be as amenable as a curate !"

"Still it was rather rough on you, Aunt Camilla."

"That was not what really mattered ; it does not signify so very much after all—when your life is over, as mine is—whether you have been a happy wife or a desolate old maid. What matters to you then is whether you have chosen the best robe and the feast, or whether you have selected the husks and enjoyed them, and thus made yourself unfit for anything higher."

"I see," murmured Jack.

"I did not grieve so much on my own account, as one solitary woman's life is not such a very important item in the world's history. But it troubled me to find that poor George had so little understanding of the true value of things, and so little sense of proportion, that he deliberately chose the lower thing and let the higher go. Not that I wish to infer that the late Lady Harland was in any way my inferior ; but I happened to be the woman he loved, and she was not."

"Did you ever see him again?" asked Jack after a moment's pause.

"Yes ; after his wife's death, when he and I were both very old people, he came to see me, and told me what a mistake it had all been. 'Camilla,' he said, 'I have never loved any woman but you, and when I gave up you I gave up happiness and all that makes life worth living. If I had my time over again I should act very differently, but how it is too late.'"

"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'George, perhaps you are going to have your

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time over again, and if so, never mind about me ; but just remember that if you again choose the second-best and let the best go by, you will be the poorer for your choice all through the next life as you have been now all through this.' You see, Jack, if God gives us our choice, and we choose foolishly and sin against wisdom, we cannot expect Him to make up the difference to us. Can we ?"

"I suppose not," answered Jack ; "yet, as a matter of fact, we generally do."

The next day Miss Desmond took her nephew all over the "Old Church," as it is called to distinguish it from all the other and newer churches of the town. She loved every detail of the grand old edifice, down from the beautiful apse at the east end to the quaintly hideous stone creature keeping watch at the foot of the pulpit steps. The frescoes that lined the chancel were newer than these, were newer even than Miss Camilla herself ; but to her they were of the deepest interest, as they had been painted from time to time in memory of the departed friends of her early days, and to look at them was like looking at faded portraits or at packets of old letters. In fact, the Old Church seemed even more home to her than did the Deanery, and she loved it even better.

In the afternoon she and Jack drove to the pretty village of Tettleigh, about two miles west of Silverhampton. They passed by rows of houses and streets of villas, where there had been nothing but apple-orchards when Miss Camilla was a girl ; and the town did not actually come to a full-stop till they crossed the canal, which lay like a river at the foot of the hill.

"It was too lonely for me to walk here by myself when I was young," the old lady said ; "yet see how crowded and busy it is now ! But George used to bring me sometimes, and then we went back by the canal, and gathered the violets that grew wild on the banks. They were the finest

violets that I have ever seen. I don't know how it is, but violets are not so sweet now as they were then ; perhaps it is because there are more of them and so they are of an inferior quality. Have you ever noticed it, Jack ?”

But Jack could not say that he had.

When they reached Tettleigh, Miss Camilla insisted on Jack's getting out of the carriage and seeing the beautiful old church there, as old, if not older, than the one in Silverhampton, though Jack was lazy and would fain have stayed where he was. And then she marched him through one of the most picturesque churchyards in Mershire, and showed him a very ancient monument representing a woman without arms or legs, which was one of the curiosities of the neighbourhood.

“The story runs,” she exclaimed, “that this woman sewed on a Sunday ; and at last her parish priest heard of it, and forbade her to do so any more.”

“But how could she sew without arms ?” asked Jack pertinently.

“Oh ! she had her arms then. She promised the priest that she would not sew on a Sunday any more, and he went away. But the very next Sunday she drew a curtain over the window, so that no one could see her, and went on sewing as usual. The priest knew that she had disobeyed him, and he went to her again ; but she swore a great oath that she had not, and she uttered a blasphemous prayer that her arms and legs might drop off if she ever sewed on a Sunday again.”

“And then I suppose the parson let her alone,” said Jack.

Miss Camilla stopped in her walk along the avenue of lime-trees and said solemnly : “In spite of the priest's continued warnings, the woman continued to sew on a Sunday, and so her arms and legs dropped off as she had said.”

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“Poor soul, she caught it, and no mistake, for disobeying the parson !”

Miss Desmond was silent for awhile, as they returned to the carriage and drove up the steep way cut through the solid red rock, and then across the breezy village-green, and along the old coach-road that leads from the Midlands to Holyhead ; then she said suddenly : “She was not punished for ‘disobeying the parson,’ as you call it, Jack. She was punished because she preferred to sit at home and sew, to going to the House of the Lord. That is to say, she cared more for dress and money and all such vanities, than for the deeper and the higher things of life. Therefore she lost her powers.”

Jack nodded. “That is an ingenious rendering of the story.”

“I think that is the lesson we are meant to learn from it. If we choose to study what is base rather than what is high, if we set our affections on vanity, and heed not the voice of wisdom, our souls will lose their arms and their feet, and will be able neither to grasp the truth on earth nor to walk in the way which leads to heaven.”

“I believe you are right,” said Jack, and his eyes grew wistful as he looked across the green fields and the blue hills to the sunset.

Miss Camilla laid her delicately gloved hand upon his arm. “Oh ! my dear,” she said in her pathetic voice, “marry in obedience to your own heart, and not in obedience to the world. And may the woman you love be worthy of you, and you of her !”

## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE USES OF GOSSIP.*

"With talk her tasks beguiling,  
She blackened people's names;  
Nor dreamed that such reviling  
Annulled her saintly claims,  
And turned to nought the good she wrought  
(According to Saint James)."

**I**T is impossible to exaggerate the evil that is caused by the style of conversation commonly called gossip; but it is very easy to misunderstand the motives of the same. When A insinuates that B has murdered his mother-in-law or taken too much to drink, A is not impelled by any hatred for B, or any intention to injure him; but merely by a craving for excitement, and a desire to say something which shall rivet the attention of C and so make A into a social success. That the path to conversational glory lies over the dead body of B's reputation is a consideration which does not enter into A's calculations; but the results are the same as if it did.

Now it happened, after Ethel Harland left Sunnydale, that time hung heavy on the hands and on the tongues of the inhabitants of that place. For one thing, the weather was too bad for any one to spend much time out of doors; and all evil things, from forced rhubarb upwards, thrive better under cover than in the open air. Then Lent began rather early, and the good people of Sunnydale denied

themselves their accustomed little gaieties—which was good ; but they made up for this lack by indulging in unusually severe comments on their neighbours and ensuring some pleasurable excitement in that way—which was not good at all ; and, one would imagine, entirely obviated any spiritual advantage arising from their self-denial.

Every Friday afternoon a sewing-party was held in Sunnydale for the purpose of making garments for the poor. Much practical good was wrought in this way ; and it was a thousand pities that much evil was wrought at the same time by those unruly members which no man can tame.

One Lenten Friday, immediately after the opening collect, Mrs. Brown began :

“It is a sad thing about young Mr. Adams, a very sad thing !”

“Dear me, and what is that, Mrs. Brown ?” asked Mrs. Cottle, threading her needle with uncton.

But Mrs. Brown, who happened to be the hostess at this particular sewing-party, was not going to waste her delicate morsels of mental nutriment by giving them away too soon ; so she shook her head in her own curiosity-arousing manner : “I hardly like to repeat it, I am sure, because after all it may not be true. Such very false reports do get spread about ; and, as I have often remarked, I cannot imagine how.”

“That is true,” sighed Mrs. Cottle : “if people would only attend to their own shortcomings and leave those of their neighbours alone, it would be better for all parties. I made this very remark yesterday to Mrs. Crowther, who was speaking, as I think most uncharitably, of the extravagance at the hall. We all know what a miser Mrs. Crowther is ; she actually pays her cook only fifteen pounds a year, and expects the poor girl to supply herself with beer out of that. And to hear her criticizing Lady Sunnydale’s extravagance was above a joke.”

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown: "only fifteen pounds a year and to find her own beer. It is scandalous!"

"So I think. In fact the Crowthers' household is entirely on a wrong basis, in my opinion. I am not sure that it is entirely meanness on Mrs. Crowther's part; I sometimes think that Mr. Crowther's business affairs are not altogether satisfactory, and that we shall hear of a smash there before very long."

The puce ribbons in Mrs. Brown's cap fairly danced with delight. "You don't say so! Well, that is a bit of news!"

"I know nothing for certain," added Mrs. Cottle cautiously; "please remember that. But I have got a pair of eyes in my head, and when I see economy which I do not think justifiable I conclude there is some disgraceful secret in the background."

"And you are wise," agreed the hostess: "there is no smoke without fire; mark my words."

Mrs. Brown was a connoisseur in smoke: she spent her life sniffing about in the hope of finding some; and when she did come across a whiff, she constructed a whole blast-furnace on the strength of it, and joyfully warmed her hands at the same.

"Dear Mrs. Brown, can you tell me how to shape this band?" said little Miss Barber, joining the other two: "you are so clever always with your fingers."

"Certainly, certainly; but at your age you ought to be able to shape a band yourself, Maria Barber."

"I know I ought; but this is a new pattern, and I felt that you would pick it up so much more quickly and correctly than I could."

"I wonder where the vicar's wife is?" remarked Mrs. Brown severely. "She ought to be here."

"She has gone to see old Jane Lowe instead," replied Miss Barber: "I met her on my way here, and she told me



that Jane was very ill and kept asking for her ; so she felt her place was at Jane's bedside rather than here."

"Well, I don't agree with her," said Mrs. Brown, pursing up her mouth : "I think a public duty should always come before a private one ; and a sewing-party is a more important matter, in my humble judgment, than the whim of a tiresome, bedridden, old woman."

"But Jane Lowe is really very ill," suggested Maria timidly ; "I hear she cannot last many days."

Mrs. Brown fairly glared. "That is just like you, Maria ; always setting up your opinion above that of your betters, and taking the part of those that are in the wrong !"

Little Miss Barber was no heroine ; she at once threw the vicar's wife to the wolves.

"Not at all, not at all, dear Mrs. Brown ; I blame Mrs. Bailey as much as you do for any neglect of duty ; and, as you say, her duty this afternoon was to come here."

The offended goddess was appeased. "Of course it was ; and my experience is that the fulfilment of duty is its own reward. I assure you, I feel a perfect glow of happiness when the day is over, and I know that I have devoted three good hours of it to working for the poor ; for there is no happiness equal to the approval of one's own conscience. But I have not yet told you about Mr. Adams. Have you heard any rumours regarding him, Maria ?"

"No, none at all," replied Miss Barber, receiving her band, in the spirit of meekness, at Mrs. Brown's hands. "What is it, dear Mrs. Brown ? Do tell us."

"Yes, do," urged Mrs. Cottle ; "you can trust us that it shall go no further, for if there is one thing that I set my face against more than another, it is malicious gossip."

"And you are quite right," said the hostess approvingly. "What I dislike so much in Mrs. Crowther is her love of gossip ; you never see her without hearing some fresh

scandal about somebody ; and how a God-fearing woman, as she professes to be, can act in such a way, passes my comprehension."

"And mine," sighed Mrs. Cottle, breaking her thread in the force of her moral disapprobation of Mrs. Crowther.

"It was she who told me about Mr. Adams," added Mrs. Brown. "She said she had heard, on very good authority, that he has taken to drinking."

"Dear me, how sad!" exclaimed the two other ladies in unison.

"And he is so young, too," added Mrs. Cottle ; "that makes it doubly shocking."

"Nothing but religion keeps young men straight," said Mrs. Brown impersonally, as if old ladies could get on perfectly well without it ; "and when I heard that Mr. Adams read novels on a Sunday, I knew what to expect."

Mrs. Brown's Sabbaths were so strictly kept, that the day was generally devoted to sleep and conversation judiciously blended ; and if now and then the sleep degenerated into laziness and the conversation into evil-speaking, who was to blame ? If one has too much of a thing, one cannot always command the quality ; and good Mrs. Brown was so busy keeping the Fourth Commandment because it happened to be easy to her, that the Ninth, which, on the contrary, was difficult, slipped out of her hands and was broken without her knowledge.

"Another young person of whom I think badly is Ethel Harland," continued Mrs. Brown. "I don't say much, but I have my suspicions of that girl."

Mrs. Cottle and Miss Barber were so much engrossed by this new idea, that they were unable to go on with their sewing, so laid it down that they might listen the better. Julia Welford also joined the group, now that the conversation had taken this turn.

"She behaved abominably with that young Le Mesurier,"

said Mrs. Cottle. "I only hope my girls will never carry on with a young man like that."

A hope which seemed, to any one who had set eyes on the Miss Cottles, predestined for fulfilment.

"I have always taught my dear girls," continued the proud mother, "never to trifle with the affections of any man, as I regard such trifling as nothing short of a sin; and I believe that they have always obeyed me."

This excellent woman's confidence in her daughters was not misplaced.

"Men are such fools," said Julia, tossing her head; "they never can see that a girl is running after them."

Wherein Miss Welford was guilty of an injustice towards masculine discernment, for Jack had seen plainly enough that she was running after him.

"Flirting is very wrong and very improper," agreed Mrs. Brown; "but it was not flirting that I was thinking of when I said I had my suspicions about Ethel Harland; I only wish it was, and that there was nothing worse behind."

Half-a-dozen eyes gleamed with joy. What a good thing it was, the three ladies felt, that they had denied themselves so far as to attend the sewing-party! Certainly virtue is sometimes its own reward.

"But what is it?" asked Mrs. Cottle; "pray tell us, for we are all dying to hear."

Mrs. Brown's puce ribbons shook like leaves in a whirlwind. "What I want to know is, how does Ethel Harland earn her living? Can any one tell me that?"

"I thought she was a governess," said Julia.

"You *thought*—yes, you *thought*; but do you *know*, my dear?"

"No, not for certain; but I always concluded that she was."

Mrs. Brown grew more mysterious than ever. "Conclusions are very dangerous things to arrive at—very

dangerous things ; and are almost always wrong, into the bargain."

"Perhaps she is a companion," suggested Miss Barber.

Mrs. Brown sniffed with scorn. "A companion, Maria ; what nonsense ! Do you suppose that any decent-minded woman would have a gad-about like that for a companion ?"

"Then what is she ?" gasped Mrs. Cottle.

"I took the trouble to ferret the matter out," continued Mrs. Brown with conscious pride, as if other people's business were "the proper study of mankind." Anyway, she was a proficient in the study. "I set little traps to catch her and her grandmother in general conversation, for I had my suspicions from the first that they were deceiving me. So by putting two and two together I discovered that she was not a governess and not a companion ; and now the question remains, What is she ?"

"Dear me, dear me !" exclaimed Mrs. Cottle, in a delightful flutter. "Perhaps she serves in a shop ; but it is, as you say, very mysterious !"

"And where there is mystery there is disgrace," added the hostess. "When people make a secret of things, it means that they are ashamed of them."

By this time even Mrs. Brown herself had ceased from her sewing and was engrossed in the subject under discussion.

"I wonder if Ethel Harland is an actress," suggested Julia. "That would account for her making a mystery of her profession."

Miss Welford had been brought up to believe that Art is on a lower social scale than Commerce ; she had also been brought up to believe that a gentleman is a man whose income is in four figures. The Welfords' faith was a simple one ; and, like all faiths, was comfortable in proportion to its simplicity.

"I believe you are right," agreed Mrs. Brown, "and that the stage is the profession of that misguided young person. Her mother was an actress, you know, before she married."

"Then there is no doubt that the daughter is following in the mother's footsteps," said Mrs. Cottle; "and now I see my own wisdom in forbidding my girls to form an intimacy with Ethel Harland. Goodness knows what harm she might not have done them, if any semblance of friendship had been permitted."

Maria Barber took up her work again, and went on with it mechanically; then she suddenly remarked: "I remember once reading a story of a girl who would never tell how she earned her living. It was a very interesting story, as the mystery was not disclosed until quite the end. Then at last it was discovered that she was a professional thief."

"Oh! my dear," gasped Mrs. Cottle, "what a suggestion! It quite shocks me."

Maria smiled innocently. "There is nothing to be shocked at, dear Mrs. Cottle; it was only a story out of a book."

"Maria," exclaimed Mrs. Brown in a hoarse whisper, "I should not be surprised if you were right, and I were wrong after all, and Ethel Harland turned out to be a professional thief, instead of being merely an actress as we at first supposed."

"Oh! I did not mean to insinuate that; I was only telling you of a tale that I once read."

"Exactly, my dear; I quite understand that. But truth is stranger than fiction, and I daresay you have, by accident, hit upon the key to the enigma. In fact, it is borne in upon me that your solution is the correct one."

Poor Maria was so pleased at being approved of openly by Mrs. Brown, that she failed to realize what harm her really innocent suggestion had already wrought.

Mrs. Cottle turned to Julia Welford. "I believe that Maria is right, though it is a terrible thing if it is true!"

"What did she say, Mrs. Cottle? She spoke so softly that I could not catch it."

"She said she believes that Ethel Harland is really a professional thief."

"Good gracious! I must tell mamma at once and warn Percy against her. It is, as you say, a terrible thing; but I am not surprised. I could believe anything of that girl."

"Now I come to think of it," Mrs. Brown was saying, "there was always a sly look in Ethel Harland's eye; instead of looking straight at you she seemed to peep through her eyelashes. This accounts for it."

"It does indeed," sighed Mrs. Cottle, "and for a great deal more in her that I could not explain at the time."

So these good people set to work to pull poor Ethel's character to pieces; and when at last there was not a shred left, Mrs. Brown offered up the collect for "that most excellent gift of charity," which all the ladies felt was a superfluous petition as far as they were concerned, for had they not devoted a whole afternoon to making clothes for the poor? To their minds the word charity meant missionary boxes and unbleached calico; its broader meaning had never yet been revealed to them. After the collect, they sat down to a most excellent tea; and before the week was out, Ethel Harland's dishonesty was an established fact in Sunnydale.

Although Ethel was undoubtedly a clever young woman, she had not yet learnt the lesson that the only way to keep a secret is to tell it to everybody. If one does this, half the hearers do not listen and the other half do not believe it, so the secret remains inviolate. But inexperienced people—whereof Ethel was one—fancy that if a skeleton is kept safely locked up in a cupboard, their neighbours will think that there is no skeleton at all; instead of which, the neighbours give their evil imaginations *carte blanche* to furnish that particular cupboard with every horror under heaven, till the truth fades into insignificance beside the

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ghastly fables they invent. Skeletons should always be kept in cupboards with glass doors.

Not long after Jack Le Mesurier's visit to Silverhampton, Sir Roger ran up to town for a day or two, and invited Jack to dine with him at his Club.

Jack attended the feast, strong in his Aunt Camilla's unworldliness; but before dinner was half over, he found his courage departing in the same way as did that of Bob Acres. If his uncle had been a man of his own size, he felt he could have stood up to him; but who could stand up to a creature who had the tongue of a devil and the face of a child?

"By the way, have you proposed to Elfrida Harland yet?" asked Sir Roger carelessly, *à propos* of nothing, as they were sitting over their wine.

"No, sir; I never said that I should."

"I know you did not: that was why I imagined you were contemplating the step."

"But I thought you knew I didn't care for the girl."

"Perhaps I did; but, if so, I had forgotten the unimportant detail. I do not wish to appear unsympathetic, my dear Jack, but your heroics bore me a little."

"And I don't wish to appear heroic," said Jack stiffly.

"No? nevertheless you do. I should almost call you grandiloquent, if I were not afraid of paining you. Save your heroics for your lady friends, my boy. Women like that sort of thing: I don't."

Jack played savagely with a wine-glass. "Still I think I have a right to express my feelings with regard to the woman you ask me to marry."

"Every right, my dear boy; every right. You have also every right to describe to me all the symptoms of your last attack of influenza. I dare say you would enjoy doing so, for I have never yet met a person who did not. But again I must ask you to spare me, and to turn to the

sympathy of your female friends. It is unfailing, where a bachelor is concerned."

"Confound you!" muttered Jack under his breath. His uncle pretended not to hear him, but continued suavely: "It occurs to me that your love-making is carried on along lines which err on the side of caution, my dear Jack. Now caution is an admirable quality in a trustee; but it is not a convincing trait in a lover. If I know anything of women, the fair Elfrida will want a little more ardour. Even plain women, with no fortune to speak of, require sighs like a furnace and burning words *en suite*. How much more an acknowledged beauty, with fifteen thousand a year?"

Jack's wine glass broke in his fingers.

"Excuse me," said his uncle, handing him the nut-crackers, "I think these will suit your purpose better."

"Look here, sir," said Jack angrily; "I am sorry to offend you, but I cannot and will not marry Elfrida Harland."

Sir Roger raised his eyebrows. "Don't apologize to me. The only difference your decision will make to me is that it will give me the trouble of altering my will, and leaving Greystone to the Irish branch of the family; so suffer no remorse on my account, I pray you. The person to whom you owe an apology is yourself; and as forgiveness of one's enemies is a Christian duty, you have every reason to calculate upon your own pardon."

The heat of Jack's anger began to cool down into the chill of despair, but he made another struggle for freedom.

"Every man has the right to please himself with regard to his marriage," he said.

His uncle was peeling a walnut with the utmost deliberation, and appeared to be attending to that rather than to the subject under discussion.

"There you are mistaken," he replied absently. "A man never pleases himself in matters of that kind; he pleases



the woman with whom he has been so misguided as to fancy himself in love."

"If a man really loves a woman, nothing pleases him so much as to see her pleased," said Jack.

Sir Roger shrugged his shoulders. "An admirable sentiment, my dear boy, and none the less admirable for being untrue. I loved a woman once; and I discovered that nothing pleased her so much as to render me and my affection ridiculous. That my taste may have been peculiar, I admit; the fact remains that when she made fun of me to finer and better-looking men, I failed to derive the slightest enjoyment from the process."

"Oh! that's different," answered Jack lamely.

"Not at all. Women are never really different; they are all exactly alike, when you get below the outer surface of their faces and their manners. One woman cannot be happy until she has a man-servant to open the door; she is called socially ambitious. Another cannot be happy without a lover; she possesses the artistic temperament. A third knows no peace unless she is ordering about a clergyman and the parish under him; she is considered very religious. The guiding principle is the same in all; it is only in the outward form that any difference lies."

"Then what is the guiding principle, do you think?"

Sir Roger waited while he removed the last scrap of walnut skin; then he replied: "The guiding principle is the necessity of having a man at their beck and call, to do what they like with; and I say, heaven help the man, whoever he may be!"

"I can imagine nothing better than to be at the beck and call of one particular woman."

"Can't you? Then all I can say is that imagination is not your strong point."

"Look here, sir," said Jack, after a moment's pause; "I don't wish to seem ungrateful or to say anything disrespect-

ful to you, but I have made up my mind to marry a girl without a penny, simply because to me she is the only woman in the world ; and nothing will alter my decision."

Sir Roger put the tips of his delicate fingers together and looked at his nephew through half-closed eyelids. "An admirable sentiment, most admirable ! It is quite refreshing to meet with such ingenuousness nowadays. You will restore my childish beliefs in fairies and pixies if you go on like this. But I wish you to understand that the genuine admiration with which your romantic behaviour inspires me will in no way alter the disposition of my property. Pray be clear upon that point."

"I am quite clear, thank you."

"Then that is all there is to be said. Except that, as a matter of vulgar curiosity on my part, I should like to know whether poverty is as attractive to the young lady as it appears to be to you. Nowadays women are not always sufficiently æsthetic to see the beauty of love in a cottage."

Jack pushed away his plate impatiently. "Nice women think more of love than of money, just as they always did."

"Pardon me : clever women say they do ; and men, who are not quite so clever, believe them."

Jack's face flushed. "The woman I love is not afraid of poverty, as she has always been poor herself."

"I see ; and knowing exactly where and how painfully the shoe pinches, she will be all the more eager to put it on. Allow me to congratulate you on your powers of reasoning ; and still more on your profound ignorance of the female character. The former I commend, but the latter I envy."

Jack had made up his mind not to quarrel with his uncle ; but he twisted the nutcrackers pretty hard just then.

"I can quite imagine the sort of woman that would attract you," continued Sir Roger. "In my young days

she would have had ringlets and principles: nowadays smooth hair and opinions mark the type. They talk about the parish and play the piano, and they are as deficient in humour as they are surcharged with propriety. As wives I believe they are unexceptionable; but to take them down to dinner is a punishment which one would not willingly inflict upon one's bitterest foes."

This description was so very inapplicable to Ethel that it did not make Jack as angry as it might have done. It is only the truth that one takes the trouble to refute; so he was able to let this pass, and to divert the current of the conversation into easier channels.

And all this time Elfrida Harland was learning the old lessons that one man is more than a million, and that the part is even greater than the whole, when the circle of one's friends is the problem in question. Because she had never really loved any one before, she gave to Jack Le Mesurier all the love of her life, which had accumulated for twenty-five years at compound interest. She knew his footstep when she heard it in the street, and she knew his ring from all others at the bell; and because she knew these, she always pretended that she had been taken by surprise when he was ushered into the drawing-room.

Until now she had found life rather a dull affair, and it had bored her considerably; but the days were no longer dull, and London was no longer empty—how could they be after Jack Le Mesurier had come to town? Now each day was delightful, for it held the possibility of a sight of Jack; and every turn might prove to be a byway to paradise, as Jack might be walking there.

One day Mrs. Seeley told Jack the story of the pink diamond. He was extremely interested in it, as his life in India had rendered him somewhat superstitious. There came a time when he wished that he had never heard the legend; but that was not till later.

## CHAPTER X.

### *THE EASTER HOLIDAYS.*

\*Dó you know that the sight of your face  
(Though I see you each day of the seven)  
Can transfigure the commonest place  
Into something that seems to be heaven ?”

**J**ACK LE MESURIER ran down to Sunnydale for Easter as he had promised ; and there he found Ethel, staying with her grandparents, and looking brighter and prettier than ever.

The conversation at the sewing-party had already begun to bear fruit ; but Ethel had not as yet grasped the fact that all the old ladies (both male and female) of Sunnydale were looking shy at her. As a matter of fact, she would not have cared if she had ; for she was as yet young and foolish—or, perhaps, wise—enough to think that one young man’s opinion is worth more than twenty old women’s as an ingredient in the manufacture of feminine happiness.

“Are you glad to see me again ?” she said to Jack one day.

“You know that without asking,” replied he.

“Of course I do ; that is why I asked. If I hadn’t have known, I shouldn’t have asked, don’t you see ?”

Which remark proved that Ethel was not lacking in woman’s logic—an entirely different science from that practised by men.

As the weather was fine, and Jack and Ethel were young

and had plenty of time on their hands, the natural conclusion to such a state of affairs was speedily arrived at; and before Ethel's Easter holidays were over, the two were engaged to be married.

Mr. and Mrs. Morgan did not interfere in any way. Ethel had been her own mistress too long to submit to their control; and if she chose to marry a man who had nothing to live upon but his pay, it was certainly more her business than theirs.

Ethel herself was tremendously in love; for she made Jack into a peg whereon to hang every virtue that she happened to admire. And her imagination so bedizened him with every desirable gift, that he became a sort of human Christmas-tree. Most women have a Christmas-tree of this kind at least once in their lives; and they deck it with artificial lights, and cover it with fruits that never grew thereon. Of course in time they discover that it was an ordinary tree, and that the lights and the gifts were fastened on, and did not really belong to the tree at all. But any child knows that a tree which has once been a Christmas-tree is never quite the same as other trees; and children of a larger growth have also learnt as much as this.

Now and then a cloud came over the sunshine of her happiness, and she moaned to herself, "What ever would he say if he knew?" And sometimes she cried herself to sleep in fear of the secret which might come between her and her lover. But she was a light-hearted woman on the whole, and had a cheerful faith that things would all eventually turn out for the best; and she reasoned that because Jack loved her much he would forgive her much also—a not altogether inevitable sequence.

At the beginning of her holiday—before she and Jack became engaged—Ethel derived much wholesome recreation from the society of Percy Welford. Although his mother and sister had done all in their power to stamp the man-

hood out of him, while he himself had ably seconded their efforts, there were still the dregs of something not altogether contemptible left at the bottom of Percy's soul. So it came to pass that, in spite of Julia's hints at Ethel's mysterious profession, and Mrs. Welford's maternal warnings against this dangerous young woman, Percy still nourished a sincere admiration for Miss Harland, and even went so far as to see her home on those occasions when there was no danger of his wetting his feet or of being found out by his mother.

And this was no light matter for Percy Welford ; for he possessed one of those not uncommon elastic souls which defy eternal truth but fall down before established etiquette. His arrogant intellect delighted to show forth how Shakespeare knew nothing about Man, and Milton still less about God : to these master minds he declined to bow. It was only when Mrs. Brown said that his manners were provincial, and the Cottle girls laughed at the cut of his coat, that Percy's proud spirit was humbled in the dust. He evolved and encouraged strange doubts in his mind, sufficient, he imagined, to provoke "tears such as angels weep" ; but on the customs of good society, as far as he knew anything about them, he was slavishly orthodox. When angels wept, Percy was bold and defiant ; it was only when ladies laughed that he began to tremble. We are all afraid of something—even the bravest of us.

Percy Welford cherished a thoroughly wholesome and English craving for knowledge as to the doings of the upper crust of society ; also a firm and healthy belief in the infallibility of any one above the rank of a baronet. Had such a thing been possible, he would have builded a house for himself upon the fly-leaf of Burke's *Peerage*, and dwelt therein in peace ; and, failing this, he dutifully read, as his daily portion, such cuttings from the *Court Circular* as found their way into the *Trawley Evening Post*. So in spite of his

sister's hints as to the mysteriousness of Ethel's occupation in London, Percy could not help feeling that a girl who had had a lord for a grandfather was not quite the same as other girls, and was, in short, not altogether unworthy of his notice and attention.

"Have you enjoyed yourself in London since I saw you last?" he asked Ethel one day, as he overtook her walking home through the village.

"Yes; more than I ever did before."

"Ah! that is because the feminine mind has a fatal aptitude to adapt itself to its surroundings, and to be satisfied with 'vacant chaff' when there is no grain within its reach. I am different from this; emptiness would always be emptiness to me, froth would always be froth, even though I knew that froth and emptiness were foredoomed to be my portion."

"I see," said Ethel. She did not think it necessary to explain that she had been happier for the last few months than she had ever been before, because Jack Le Mesurier had come into her life.

"You must forgive me for saying that all finely nurtured souls cherish this divine discontent," continued Percy; "and turn away dissatisfied from everything which falls short of the absolute perfection which they crave."

Ethel stole a glance at Percy's hat, and wondered whether his finely nurtured soul turned away from that. It certainly fell short of absolute perfection, even of moderate good style; but she forbore to put the question to him, and listened meekly as he went on:

"You can imagine, or rather you cannot imagine, how distasteful Sunnydale is to me whom even London fails to satisfy. The people here are so commonplace—in fact, so common—that they grate upon me at every turn. Look at their clothes, for instance; they are enough to make a gentleman shudder."

"I quite agree with you." With Percy's present costume before her eyes, Ethel could do this in all sincerity.

"Then take their manners. They are loud-voiced and bumptious, and talk of nothing but themselves and their own concerns, as if other people wanted to know what they do and think and feel, forsooth!"

Ethel's eyes twinkled. "That is very bad-mannered of them! You ought to go and live in London if you find provincial society so uncongenial."

"Even London would not satisfy me," continued Percy gloomily. "My soul is always starved while I am there. It is all so hollow, so false, so meretricious; but perhaps you are as yet too young to notice the gnawing worm within the apparently smiling fruit."

"What do you mean by smiling fruit? I don't quite understand."

For a moment Percy experienced an awful doubt as to Ethel's seriousness, and looked round at her hastily. But there was nothing in her expression to arouse his suspicions; she was merely gazing at him with an air of pretty bewilderment, like a puzzled child.

"I mean that fashionable life is a volcano," he said, "where men dance in sunny vineyards, heedless of the seething crater boiling beneath their feet."

"But how can a volcano be a fruit?"

Percy thought what a pity it was that pretty women were nearly always stupid.

"I was speaking in metaphors, Miss Harland. It is a way I have when I am at all moved; but do not let my cynicism overcloud your brightness. We look at fashionable life from different standpoints, and I would not let my foolish wisdom shadow your blissful ignorance."

The standpoint from which he looked at fashionable life was usually the *table d'hôte* of a large hotel. It was no wonder that his view was a depressing one.



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“What have you seen from your standpoint?”

“I have seen that human nature is bad—bad to the core; and I have learnt to put no faith in any of my fellow-creatures. It is perhaps a disadvantage to be as clear-sighted as I am. I often envy simpler souls who can still be cajoled and deceived; but it is my lot, as a man of the world, to see through all the little artifices that take in blinder men: so I must bear the curse of wisdom and not complain.”

Ethel stifled a laugh. She had never met any one in her life so gullible as Percy.

“It must be a bore to be as wise as that,” she said.

He sighed. “Clearness of vision ever brings to its possessor as much pain as pleasure. I often wish I did not see faults and failings so clearly. I should be a happier man.”

“Then do you see your own faults as clearly as you see other people’s?”

“Quite—quite; and that is where the pain comes in. I know that I am scornful and bitter and sceptical, and too severe on the weaknesses of my fellow-creatures, and too proud of my own intellectual superiority. But knowing this, alas! will not make me into an amiable, credulous fool.”

Of course it would not, because Nature had done so already; but of this Percy was not aware.

“I wish you would tell me something about fashionable life,” entreated Ethel. “It would interest me so much.”

Now this was distinctly wrong of her, and she knew that it was; but Percy began to enjoy himself immensely, in all good faith.

“I have seen a great deal of high life, and I have looked below the surface; and it is this which has made me what I am,” he sighed.

“And is it all as gay and careless and frivolous as it looks?” asked Ethel.

"No; its mirth is folly and its laughter is tears. I remember once meeting the beautiful Countess of Mershire, and learning from her how weary she was in the midst of all her splendour. I have never forgotten it."

Percy had once bought a buttonhole from Lady Mershire at a bazaar. He had remarked that it was a fine day for the time of year, and her ladyship was yawning so violently that she could not answer him. But the story sounded quite thrilling told as he told it.

"Lady Mershire is a pretty woman, and she has the most wonderful diamonds," said Ethel absently.

Percy looked surprised. What could a little governess know about Lady Mershire's diamonds? He recalled Julia's insinuations, and uncomfortable doubts crept into his mind.

Seeing his look of surprise, Ethel realized what she had said. She grew very red, and hastened to add, in a blundering way, quite unlike her usual easy manner:

"At least I have heard that she is—has, I mean. Do you think it is going to be fine to-morrow? The sunset is very red, and a red sky at night generally means a fine day, doesn't it?"

"I don't know."

Percy did not like being put off like this. Why should Ethel be so uncomfortable, and show so obviously that her acquaintance with Lady Mershire's diamonds was an acquaintance of which she was ashamed, he wondered? It was quite possible, if not probable, that a governess might have met the Countess in the house of her employers and seen her wonderful jewels; but why should she be so vexed at having let out the fact? Even Percy's somewhat blunt intelligence felt that there was something not quite comfortable and aboveboard here.

As for Ethel, she was saying to herself: "I must be more careful, or people will find me out, and then what will Jack

say? I think I should die if he refused to forgive me ; and yet he may throw me over altogether when he knows. I must keep him in the dark a little longer, and enjoy for a while the first real happiness that has yet come into my life,"

For the rest of the way home Ethel was very quiet. She had not even spirit enough left to make fun of Percy Welford ; and her grandparents noticed that she was not her usual bright self that evening.

When Jack first became engaged to Ethel, he said to her one day : " Dear, I want you to tell me all about yourself, so that there may be no secrets between us. I have shown you every page of my life, and now I want you in return to let me read every page of yours."

Ethel caught her breath in a little sob. " Oh Jack ! anything but that."

" Why not, darling ? Surely the man who is going to be your husband has the right to know everything about you."

" Yes, you have the right, I admit ; but, Jack, dear, won't you trust me a little longer ?"

" Of course I will trust you till death if need be ; but I cannot for the life of me see why there should be any secrecy between us. I am not such a cad as to think any the worse of a woman because she has to earn her own living ; on the contrary, I respect and honour her far more than I do the fine ladies who only sit at ease and enjoy themselves."

" That is just like you ; you always look at things from the highest point of view."

" I don't know about that ; I take the common-sense view, that is all. Why, sweetheart, I believe I first fell in love with you because I thought it so splendid of you to fight life's battle by yourself, and I longed to be allowed to fight it for you."

Ethel drew a deep sigh. " You are a good man, Jack ; the very best I ever met."

"No, no, I'm not; it is because you like me that you imagine things concerning me. I am really a most ordinary and commonplace individual. But you have never told me how you earn your living, Ethel; and I confess that I should like to know. Are you a governess, or a companion, or what?"

Ethel was silent for a moment, then she said: "Jack, would you do anything for me that I wanted?"

"You know I would."

"Then I ask you to trust me a little longer, and not to put any more questions to me. I want you to give me your word that you will not ask me—or anybody else—for information respecting me and my means of livelihood until I choose to give you such information of my own free will. I have a special reason for wishing to keep my affairs secret for a time, and I know you will respect this wish, as you do all my wishes."

"Of course I will," answered Jack, who could not very well do less.

"And you mustn't take any notice of the nasty things that people say about me. People are always ready to say nasty things of a woman whose misfortune it is to stand alone. I may have been foolish, I admit—in fact I now realize that I have been very foolish indeed, and have made a great mistake. But foolishness is not wrongness, is it?"

"Of course it is not. But don't you think I could help you to overcome the effects of your folly, whatever it may have been, if only you would tell me all about it?"

Ethel looked at him reproachfully. "Oh Jack, and you promised not to ask any more questions!"

"Well, dearest, I won't if you don't like it. But all the same I wish you would let me help you."

"The only way you can help me is by trusting me."

"Then I will do that with all my heart, because I know that you will never deceive me." And Jack kept his word.

There was great excitement and much disapprobation in Sunnydale at the news of Captain Le Mesurier's engagement to Ethel Harland. Whenever the subject was mentioned, the old ladies attuned their voices to that sad drawl which people always use when they are referring to a headache or a bereavement; their "poorly voice," Ethel called it; and the young ladies all said that Jack was a most unattractive man, and that nothing would have induced them to marry him if he had asked them. So it seemed fortunate, all things considered, that Jack had asked Ethel.

He was radiant, in spite of the fact that he had flung wealth and Greystone away, and had doomed himself to return to India and finish his time there. Jack was a resolute man, and one who never indulged in regrets. He knew what he wanted, and he made up his mind to get it at all costs; and if the cost happened to be heavier than he expected, it was only the fortune of war, and in no way hindered him from doing what he originally intended. The only fly of any size in his ointment was Ethel's refusal to tell him all about herself. He trusted her implicitly and loyally forbore to make any more inquiries as to her occupation. He was enough of a gentleman to avoid the subject after he had seen that it was distasteful to her; but he was also enough of a man to chafe inwardly at the restriction she had imposed upon him. Mysteriousness is by no means "an excellent thing in woman," and especially in a woman whose name is ordained to be blazoned on the sacred pages of the *Baronetage*.

Lady Silverhampton had once said in Jack's hearing, "A girl should always tell a man all about herself, even when there isn't a word of truth in it." Poor Ethel was not so wise in her day and generation as Lady Silverhampton, as Jack learned to his cost.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *EASTBOURNE.*

“The stupid people come and go,  
And prate of pleasures old and new;  
But they offend and bore me so  
Because, sweetheart, they are not you.”

WHEN Ethel's Easter holidays were over, Jack returned to town, with that ghastly sense of a hole in his life which certain partings induce in everybody at some time or another. And because his heart was full of Ethel, and his conscience not quite comfortable as to how Elfrida would receive the news of his engagement, he did not call upon Miss Harland as soon as he might have done, nor did he let her know of his return to London. When at last he did call at the house in Mayfair, he found that Elfrida had gone to Eastbourne for a week, and his feeling was certainly not that of disappointment. Thus have even brave men the fear of Woman before their eyes.

In common with the rest of the world, Elfrida had been away from town for Easter. When she returned—with the rest of the world—and found that there was nothing going on in London (that is to say, that Captain Le Mesurier did not call upon her), she was so restless that she went away again; and thus missed the very thing for which she was longing.

That is so like Fate: she generally arranges for one's

heart's desire to call the very day after one has grown tired of staying in for it; just as she sends her choicest invitations for evenings already filled up by a previous engagement. It is her way of amusing herself—also of educating men and women at the same time.

Elfrida's mind was so full of Jack that she could not settle down to anything. Consequently Arabella Seeley was having rather a hard time. It still never occurred to Elfrida to regard her sister as a serious rival, although she saw how ready was Jack to fight Ethel's battles. But she knew Ethel's secret, and Jack did not; which accounted for their different ways of looking at the matter. But though Miss Harland was not troubled by any pangs of jealousy, she was not altogether happy about Jack; she did not as yet feel sure of his feelings for her, though she did not suspect him of caring for any other woman. Hence, her restlessness and irritability with Mrs. Seeley; hence, also, a somewhat worn and anxious look on her usually impassive face. People who are not sure about things are very tiresome to live with, as poor Arabella proved just then.

"I think Eastbourne is a sweet place," said the latter one day, making a frantic effort after pleasantness and peace.

"What nonsense, Arabella! It is the dullest place in the world."

"Then why not go back to London, dear love?"

"Because London is ten times duller," replied Elfrida crossly.

After a few minutes' silence, in which Arabella thought of what she should say next, and Elfrida wondered what Jack was doing at that particular moment, Mrs. Seeley remarked: "I saw Sir Philip Cay on the sea-wall to-day. I am sure he has come after you, Elfrida, and for no other reason; because he took the trouble to explain to me that

it was very annoying for him to have to leave town just now, but he was here expressly by his doctor's orders. That was conclusive to my mind."

"How silly you are, Arabella! You are always thinking that men are in love, and it is so absurd."

It is sometimes more uncomfortable to think that they are not, as Elfrida herself had learnt.

"You think and talk too much about love," she continued sternly; "and it is a waste of time."

Which perhaps was true; but it was a form of extravagance which Elfrida was hardly in a position to reprove just then.

"Don't you think that you flirt a teeny-weeny bit too much?" suggested Mrs. Seeley.

"Me? I don't flirt at all."

"Oh yes, you do, darling. You flirt with Sir Philip and with Captain Le Mesurier and with——"

"Well, of course I do. What are men made for but to flirt with? Do you think I am the sort of woman who will talk to them about their souls, or offer to darn their stockings?"

"Of course not, dear Elfrida. But it is wrong to break their strong, brave hearts, don't you think? I'm sure I don't know what I should do if I broke a man's heart. I don't indeed."

"I do. You would talk to him in a whiney-piney voice, and offer him a cough-lozenge; and then think he would soon be all right again; and he probably would."

Mrs. Seeley sighed: it grieved her sorely when Elfrida spoke like this. She was one of those romantic women who live in a city composed entirely of harmless little castles in the air; and when Elfrida bombarded her city and left it in ruins, Arabella mourned.

"You do not understand men, my love: you treat them as if they were grown-up children."



## A Double Thread

"And so they are," retorted Elfrida, "except in the instances when they happen to be old women."

Now even a worm will turn if you provoke it sufficiently; and by this time Arabella's turning-point had been reached. So she said, in her sweetest tone:

"Do you know, darling, I should not call Captain Le Mesurier either a young child or an old woman."

"Of course he is not. Who ever said he was? You really are very inconsequent this afternoon."

"You said he was, dearest."

"I didn't. I never mentioned Jack—I mean Captain Le Mesurier's name, so how could I have said anything against him? You will aggravate me if you go on like this."

After this snub the worm nerved itself for a fresh revolt.

"Talking of Captain Le Mesurier, has it ever occurred to you, my sweetest, that he is in love with your sister, Miss Ethel Harland?"

Elfrida's face changed. "No," she answered slowly, "I don't think it ever has. What put such an idea as that into your head?"

"Well, he seems to like talking about her, I think."

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"Also, my love," continued Mrs. Seeley, "I think that you are a wee bit too sharp-tongued for the captain, though he admires your undoubted good looks; and as he tells me that your sister possesses your beauty without your grand air, I conclude that he finds her more attractive and more in accordance with his peculiar taste. You live too much under a strain, darling, and so are not quite easy enough for simple-minded people; and soldiers are always simple-minded, the dear creatures!"

"People who don't live under a strain, as you call it, grow old and rude and ugly. There is nothing so fatal to good manners and good looks as an easy life."

"I don't think so, darling."

"Then I do."

"Another thing that makes me think that the captain is interested in your sister is that he is so extremely anxious to induce you to make friends with her, and assist her," added Mrs. Seeley.

"Pooh! that is nothing. Any man would naturally feel sorry for a girl in Ethel's position, or at least in the position in which Captain Le Mesurier supposes Ethel to be, and would do anything in his power to help her. I see no proof of special devotion in that."

Elfrida had pulled herself together by this time, and tried to speak naturally. She had no intention of wearing her heart on her sleeve for Arabella Seeley to peck at.

But Arabella was bent on pecking, and refused to be put off with anything less interesting than Elfrida's heart.

"Did you never notice," she continued, "how his face lights up at the mere mention of Ethel's name? It makes him look five years younger and ten times better-looking, and is far more becoming than saying prunes and prism."

"What stuff! You allow your imagination to run away with you; and, besides, it is very bad form to spy upon people like that, and remark upon it afterwards. But have you actually seen him show any feeling at the mention of my sister's name?"

"Of course I have, dearest Elfrida, or I should not have called your attention to it. I wonder you haven't noticed it yourself, it is so very obvious. But people who have never been in love are sadly blind to these things, which are open secrets to us who have loved and suffered."

Even Arabella could be spiteful at times.

After a long silence, during which Mrs. Seeley enjoyed the taste of victory, Elfrida suddenly said in a voice that trembled a little in spite of all her efforts to steady it: "Do

you think that look on a man's face means that he just admires a girl, or that he really cares for her?"

Arabella's spite was short-lived, and on hearing that suspicious little quiver in Elfrida's voice she melted at once. "Men are so different, darling, that we never can judge one by another; and what means a great deal in one man, in another means nothing at all. For instance, Willy Chase used to tell me at least three times every week how much he loved me, and Teddy Simpson never mentioned it more than twice a year; yet I believe Teddy cared for me more than Willy did. And I dare say Captain Le Mesurier is a man who looks much and feels little; the two often go together."

"Perhaps so," replied Elfrida absently.

"Besides, dear, when he learns that there is a secret in Ethel's life I am sure he will cease to care for her, even if he does so already; for men of Captain Le Mesurier's type hate mysteries, and never can forgive a woman for keeping them in the dark. I have no idea, as you know, what Ethel's secret is; neither, he tells me, has he; though I am sure, love, if you would only trust me you would never feel your confidence had been misplaced."

It was a sore point with Mrs. Seeley that the reason why the twin sisters were doomed to lifelong separation, was as much a mystery to her as to the rest of the world.

"And then you see, darling Elfrida, when he finds out, as he is bound to do some time, that your sister has deceived him and kept him in the dark, he will lose all further interest in her, and will be no longer incensed against you for not helping her, as he is now. He will then quite forgive you, I have no doubt, for refusing to share your wealth with Ethel; as the more a man has cared for a girl, the more bitter against her he is when he finds her out."

But in spite of Arabella's *amende honorable* and comfort-

ing words, Elfrida Harland cried herself to sleep that night, and on many succeeding ones.

“O Jack, Jack,” she moaned aloud, “what shall I do without you? Don’t you know that I only care for my money because it may serve you, and for my beauty because it may please you? To me there is nothing but you in the whole world; and now I have lost you!”

When Arabella saw the results of her spiteful words, in Elfrida’s heavy eyes and pale cheeks, she bitterly repented of what she had said. But she could not unsay them. So easy is it to put out the light in another’s face, and so impossible to rekindle it. Any passer-by can extinguish a lamp; but it is only the lamp-lighter who can light it again; and if he (or she) be busy lighting lamps elsewhere, we are doomed to abide in darkness.

Now it happened that while Elfrida Harland was eating her heart out at the Grand Hotel at Eastbourne, Mrs. Cottle brought her daughters from Sunnysdale to sojourn in that very house. To Mrs. Cottle a yearly visit to the seaside was what a London season is to matrons of a higher growth; that is to say, it was a dive into the vortex of society, in search of a pearl in the shape of a desirable son-in-law.

Although the Miss Cottles were as yet the Miss Cottles, their mother’s net was not altogether empty; for Janetta had met an excellent young man at Margate two years previously, and had speedily discovered that the soul of a hero may be hidden behind the features of an accountant. After making which discovery she consented to share the home of the hero at such future time as the purse of the accountant could provide the same. Emmeline, the second Miss Cottle, was still disengaged; but her sister’s success made every seaside trip a season of hope to her, and every *table d’hôte* a possible banquet of love.

The Miss Cottles had been christened Jane and Emma; but their mother called them Janetta and Emmeline for short.

On the night of their arrival at Eastbourne they came down early to dinner, so as to see how the land lay and who else was staying at the hotel. At *tables d'hôte* the Cottles always declined to have a small table to themselves, and chose to sit at the large centre one where bachelors most do congregate. They said it was "more lively"; and so it was.

On this occasion, as they were watching their co-travellers pour into the *salle-à-manger*, Emmeline suddenly exclaimed: "Oh! see, mamma, isn't that Ethel Harland there, looking quite the lady?"

"I fancy it is," exclaimed Mrs. Cottle, putting on her eyeglasses; "but it is difficult to recognize any one at this distance."

"She *is* got up, and no mistake," added Janetta.

"She is a ripping fine girl," said Janetta's *fiancé* who was christened Ebenezer and called Benny.

"I don't admire that style," remarked Janetta severely; "I call it coarse."

Benny caved in at once. "I mean to say that for a fair woman she is not bad-looking; but dark girls for me, if you please!"

Janetta softened again. Her hair was the colour of a wet umbrella, and her eyes were like little black currants. Naturally Elfrida's golden hair did not appeal to her sense of the beautiful, and she rightly felt that it ought not to have appealed to Benny's.

"She is sadly over-dressed," sighed Mrs. Cottle; "I do not think it is ladylike for young girls to wear silk. She would look far more genteel in something simple."

"Far more," agreed Janetta; and Benny added "Far," like a polite echo.

"She seems to have lots of admirers," said Emmeline wistfully. "Look how they are buzzing round her."

Mrs. Cottle shook her head. "Very improper. Very

improper indeed! I cannot bear to see young girls talking to a crowd of men like that. I call it most unmaidenly—especially when they must all be wanting to commence their dinners.”

“Who is the lady with her, I wonder?” was Emmeline’s next remark.

“Evidently quite a common person,” replied her mother loftily; “there is nothing of the lady about her.”

Emmeline continued to watch the Harland party with envy. “They seem to be having lots of fun,” she said, with a sigh.

Mrs. Cottle shook her head. “My dear Emmeline, how often must I tell you that there is nothing so vulgar as fun! It shocks me to see young women laughing heartily; real ladies only smile.”

Mrs. Cottle was frequently “shocked.” She considered it a prerogative of gentility.

“Still, mamma, it must be nice to have several beaux at once—especially such nicely dressed ones.”

“My word, Emmeline, what common ideas you have! I cannot imagine where you get them from, as your dear papa and I have always been so refined in our ideas, and have never let our children mix with anybody except well-to-do people. It is positively shocking to hear you talk in that way! I have told you that Ethel Harland is not at all a nice person, or a suitable friend for my daughters. And what I see now confirms me still further in my opinion. So do give over looking at her, and attend to your dinner like a young lady.”

Whereupon Emmeline relapsed into rather sulky silence, while Mrs. Cottle entered into pleasant and instructive conversation with an elderly gentleman on her left hand. As for Benny and Janetta, they talked to each other, and the former endeavoured to atone for the double mistake of admiring Elfrida and of saying so.

After a time Mrs. Cottle turned again to her family circle in a state of great excitement.

"Oh! my dears, what do you think? We have made a great mistake! That sweet young lady is not Ethel Harland at all, but her wealthy and beautiful twin sister, the late Lord Harland's heiress. This gentleman has been telling me all about her. It is most interesting!" And Mrs. Cottle put up her eyeglasses so that she might study Elfrida's habits the more minutely.

"She is the very image of Ethel," remarked Emmeline.

But her mother demurred. "No, my love, no; there is a refinement about this sweet young lady which Ethel altogether lacks; and though there is doubtless a family resemblance between the two, they are really quite different. You can see at a glance that Miss Elfrida Harland has been brought up in wealthy and aristocratic circles; while Ethel has all the pushing self-confidence of a young person who earns her own living."

"This one is certainly much more ladylike than Ethel," agreed Janetta. "Mamma is quite right. Don't you think so, Benny?"

But Benny had learnt wisdom from recent experience, and merely repeated that Miss Harland was not bad-looking for a fair girl, but dark girls for him, if Janetta pleased.

"And isn't her toilet elegant?" continued Mrs. Cottle rapturously. "After all, there is nothing looks so well as silk, or pays so well for making up. And what a graceful creature Miss Harland has with her! Her lady-companion, I make no doubt. Quite an aristocratic person! I shouldn't be surprised if she turned out to be the daughter of a regular army officer, or perhaps even the widow of a clergyman."

Emmeline gazed open-mouthed at the Harland party. "She seems an awful flirt, I think."

Mrs. Cottle reproved her offspring at once. "My love,

you should not make uncharitable remarks. It is natural for young persons to be lively and to wish to enjoy themselves; and it is not fair to accuse a young lady of flirting just because she is so attractive that gentlemen cannot help but admire her. You should not be so severe on your own sex, Emmeline. If you are, people will say you are growing bitter and jealous, and there is nothing spoils a girl's chances as much as that. I'm sure when I was young I often said girls were pretty when I thought them hideous, for fear the men should say I was growing spiteful; for when a girl is growing spiteful it means that she is growing old."

For the remainder of the meal Mrs. Cottle watched Miss Harland's proceedings with absorbing interest, while Janetta and Emmeline examined from afar her Parisian gown; and decided, with a faith which could have worked miracles if employed in a right direction, to have two exact reproductions made of it, for their own wear, by the village dressmaker at home.

The next day Mrs. Cottle found no rest for the sole of her foot until she had started an acquaintanceship with the wealthy Miss Harland. To meet a lord's granddaughter on the common ground of a seaside hotel and not to "make friends" with her, was a culpable waste of opportunity whereof Mrs. Cottle would have scorned to be found guilty. In this worthy lady's vocabulary the expression "making friends" meant exchanging a few remarks about the weather, unscreened by the sanction of a formal introduction.

Fate smiled upon her efforts. At about midday she ran Elfrida to earth in the entrance hall.

"A beautiful morning," she began; "such delightful sunshine, and the wind is bracing without being cold."

"Charming," replied Miss Harland laconically. But Mrs. Cottle was not to be rebuffed.



"And this is such a sweet place," she continued; "so healthy and yet so fashionable. My dear daughters and I are quite in love with it, I can assure you. We are acquainted with a number of health resorts, but find this the most delightful one that we have yet visited."

"It is a pretty town."

Then Mrs. Cottle forsook the paths of platitude, and tried a more personal, and therefore a more intimate, style of conversation.

"I think that you and I ought to be friends, Miss Harland, as I happen to be acquainted with your charming sister."

"Indeed; I myself have not that pleasure," replied Elfrida stiffly.

Mrs. Cottle looked puzzled. "Not acquainted with your own sister, Miss Harland? Surely that is only your fun! I have frequently had the pleasure of meeting her at Sunnydale, and she and my dear girls are quite bosom-friends."

Now that Ethel seemed about to develop into a bridge suitable for the conveyance of Mrs. Cottle into good society, that sensible woman began to speak well of the organist's granddaughter.

"Perhaps," she continued, "Miss Ethel Harland may have mentioned our names in her letters. I am Mrs. Cottle, and my girls are named Janetta and Emmeline. Janetta is engaged to a most admirable young gentleman, Mr. Ebenezer Peck by name, whom we had the good fortune to meet at Margate two years ago. He very kindly repaired the tyre of Janetta's bicycle one day when she punctured it three miles out of the town. They struck up an acquaintanceship and exchanged cards, and by the time our little seaside trip was over they were engaged to be married."

"Indeed." Elfrida was not encouraging.

"Doubtless your sister has named us to you," added the dauntless matron.

"I have never had a letter from my sister in my life. She and I were separated by the express wish of Lord Harland when we were in our cradles, and we have held no communication with each other since."

"Dear me!" gasped Mrs. Cottle. She could not quite stifle an irreverent feeling that the domestic arrangements of the aristocracy were a little peculiar at times.

"Therefore I have no idea where my sister is, nor who her friends may be. It would be impossible to find two persons more completely apart than my twin sister and myself."

After which unmistakable snub Elfrida strolled out of the door, leaving Mrs. Cottle defeated for once in her life: the good lady's only consolation being that no one else had been present to witness her discomfiture.

It is not what happens to us that matters so much, but who sees it happen. The sense of proportion is less important to most of us than the sense of perspective; and the village at our gates is considerably larger in our eyes than the city that is far off. Mrs. Cottle did not mind defeat, but she minded sorely lest Sunnysdale should know that she had been defeated; just as Janetta's engagement would have been robbed of half its splendour had not Benny been dragged at her chariot wheels up Sunnysdale High Street.

Wisdom dwelt with the Scotchman who said, "And who'd care to ride in his ain carriage, if the gude folks of Dunfermline werena there to see it?"

This man had no sense of proportion, but his knowledge of perspective was profound.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *JACK'S CONFESSION.*

"I need thee, Love, in peace or strife;  
For, till Time's latest page be read,  
No other smile could light my life  
Instead."

**W**HILE Miss Harland was thinking about Jack, and quarrelling with Arabella, and snubbing Mrs. Cottle at Eastbourne, Captain Le Mesurier ran down to Greystone for the day, in order to break the news of his engagement to his uncle.

The sight of the fine old home which ought to have been his, but which he had renounced for Ethel's sake, added fuel to the fire of his love for her. This was because he was a man, and therefore self-sacrifice was a voluntary, if violent, form of exercise to him. Had he been a woman, the effect would have been precisely opposite; as to her, self-sacrifice would have been a daily and disagreeable duty, too recurrent to allow of any afterglow.

Sir Roger looked as bland and childlike as ever. He was so small a personage that Time had apparently overlooked him in passing.

"Sit down, my dear nephew," he began cordially; "I presume you have something disagreeable to say, or else you would not have come down by a morning train. People who say pleasant things always travel after lunch. It is only relations and subscription-hunters that call in the morning."

"I am afraid that I have something disagreeable to say: I have come to tell you that I am engaged to be married."

Sir Roger raised his eyebrows. "Disagreeable to the lady or to me?"

"To you; she hasn't any money."

"Pardon me, not to me; to you, without doubt, and probably to herself."

"I called to tell you, instead of writing, because I thought it would vex you," said Jack boyishly.

"My dear Jack, how nice and thoughtful of you! But why on earth should it vex me? The unavoidable discomforts arising from poverty will doubtless inconvenience both yourself and the future Lady Le Mesurier; but it would be affectation of me to pretend that my eternal slumber will be any the less sweet because you and she are compelled to wear ready-made clothes and to dine off cold mutton."

Again Jack experienced the paralysing effect of his uncle's gay cynicism. It made him feel as insipid and shapeless as if he had been a boned turkey at a ball supper.

Sir Roger continued. "Is it permitted to ask the name of the young lady whose attractions are powerful enough to render the atmosphere of poverty and the air of India alike salubrious and refreshing?"

"Ethel Harland; Elfrida Harland's penniless twin sister."

"Indeed; how deeply interesting, and even touching! Here are two sisters, equally well-born and beautiful and accomplished, I presume, one being the sole mistress of fifteen thousand a year, and the other utterly impecunious; and either yours to be had for the asking. With a Quixotism, fortunately as rare as it is remarkable, you select the latter and let the former go. From an altruistic or æsthetic point of view your action is simply admirable; but I have my doubts if, from a domestic one, it will be equally satisfactory."

"Look here, sir," said Jack, "I don't want to irritate you

or to go in for what you call heroics ; but I just wish to tell you that my attachment to Ethel Harland is so great that it would be impossible for me ever to care for any other woman."

"Of course, of course ; most natural and most creditable. There is but one cure for a love-affair, so far as I have ever heard."

"And what is that ?"

"Another."

"Believe me, sir, you would not talk in this fashion if you had seen Ethel."

Sir Roger waved his hand in his usual airy fashion. "Spare me, my dear Jack ; spare me, I entreat you. I admit that if a woman can outweigh in a man's estimation all the other good things of life, her attractions must be—well, decidedly more considerable than the wisdom of the man. Therefore I conclude that Miss Emily—or did you say Ethel ?—Harland is a most charming young person ; but it would bore me terribly to have her charm demonstrated by you. I take it as read."

Jack rose from his chair. "Then there is nothing more to be said. I had better be getting back to town."

"Gently, my dear boy, gently. The fact that you have spoiled your life is no reason why you should spoil your lunch, and my cook is far more capable of preparing the one than you are of arranging the other. So go for a stroll, and take another look at the price which you are willing to pay in exchange for the affections of Miss Emily—I beg your pardon, Miss Ethel—Harland."

"I think that if you were to see Ethel you would understand my feeling for her," repeated Jack, trying to speak gently.

"Oh ! there is no necessity for that ; I can understand your feeling perfectly, thank you—I only fail to commend it. Yours is not at all an abstruse problem—not at all a

complicated case. It is as simple and as common as measles or whooping-cough; the only funny thing is that you should have such a violent attack at your time of life. Were you seventeen, instead of seven-and-twenty, your condition would be absolutely normal."

Jack looked somewhat offended. "I can only repeat, as I said before, that you do not understand me in the least, Sir Roger."

"Pardon me; we never laugh at jokes unless we understand them, and now you are amusing me immensely. My only regret is that I fear the future Lady Le Mesurier will fail to appreciate the humour of the position as thoroughly as I do. When a joke is made at one's own expense, it somehow loses point, don't you know? And I fancy the expenses of this joke will fall somewhat heavily upon you and your wife in time to come. But it is nevertheless extremely funny to onlookers."

"Ethel is no more afraid of poverty than I am," replied Jack loftily.

"Indeed; just as doubtless she is quite innocent of the fact that you are certainly heir to a baronetcy, and possibly to a fine fortune and estate as well. It is remarkable how often courage and simplicity go together!"

"You do her a base injustice."

Sir Roger shook his head. "It is also remarkable how often justice is called injustice when she takes off her bandage and ceases to play at blind-man's-buff; and how we always say that people don't appreciate us when they begin to appreciate us thoroughly."

Jack was really cross by this time—with his uncle for saying such things, and with himself for listening to them—so he answered sharply: "It is also interesting that whenever people suspect other people of anything, you may safely conclude that the suspects are capable—if not actually guilty—of that thing themselves. When a man complains

continually of the meanness of his companions, I know that that man is mean ; when a woman persistently suspects her friends of insincerity, I know that that woman is insincere. It is only by seeing a fault in ourselves that we learn to expect it in other people."

Sir Roger nodded and smiled. "Quite true, my dear boy ; and your remark shows powers of perception for which I have hitherto not given you credit. It also leads me to conclude that your own ideas of the folly of mankind in general must be somewhat exaggerated."

Jack strode out of the room and banged the door behind him. His uncle's views of men and things—and most especially of women—grated upon him at every turn, and yet imbued him with such a sense of powerlessness as made fighting appear absurd as well as ineffectual. It was in Sir Roger's power of making things appear absurd that his real strength lay.

Ridicule is a terrible weapon, and is powerless only against those who in their turn possess a sense of humour. And herein Jack Le Mesurier was deficient.

When all the fairies are invited to a baby's christening, the most important invitation is the one addressed to the Goddess of Humour ; and the postage of that should always be remembered whatever others are forgotten. For it is only this particular fairy who can prevent people from making blunders and verses and all such atrocities. Without her for guide, men become instructive and women sentimental, and both equally tiresome. But those who can claim her as their fairy godmother, find all the common pumpkins of everyday life turned into state coaches ; and dance along earth's dusty ways in slippers made of shining glass instead of dull black leather. For it is Goddess Humour alone who can show us the hidden pathos, and therefore the hidden beauty, of things and people whom the other fairies would deem dull and commonplace. It is

she alone who can teach us that the little nibbling cares and annoyances, which would worry us to death if we let them have their way, can be turned into well-behaved menials, and made to stand in their proper place out of sight behind our equipage, by the simple expedient on our part of laughing at them instead of taking them seriously. And she is very hospitable ; for she brings to all her godchildren an invitation to the state banquet, which is none other than the "continual feast" of the wise man's "merry heart." Also, she insists on their leaving punctually on the stroke of the clock ; for she is clever enough to know that the really nice things are the things whereof we do not have quite enough, and that nothing will change the coaches back into pumpkins and the flunkeys back into mice so quickly as the process known as being bored.

When Jack Le Mesurier flung himself out of his uncle's presence, much to that uncle's unholy amusement, he walked across the park to the old church, and had another look at the images of those dead and gone ancestors of his ; and then he entered the rectory garden and came face to face with the rector, who was busy setting his garden in order for the coming summer.

The sight of the stone warriors soothed Jack just as it had done before. It seemed as if they had as much right to laugh at his uncle as his uncle had to laugh at him. How ridiculous it must seem to them, after some four centuries' experience, to see men and women bartering their hearts and souls for such worthless trifles as rank and wealth and pleasure—things which were fifth-rate at best, and then only annuals. To them it must appear so childish and unbusiness-like to exchange real jewels for sham ones, and freeholds for short leases. It was a comfort to think that anybody could dare to laugh at Sir Roger ; and Jack felt sure that those old crusaders were doing it somehow and somewhere.



"I've been looking at those old Le Mesuriers in there," he said abruptly to the rector, "and wondering if they are laughing at our ridiculous views of life."

Mr. Cartwright smiled. "I have no doubt of it; we must seem very absurd to them."

"Very; and I wonder if they despise us too."

"I do not think so; they know too much by this time and are too wise to despise anybody. I agree with you that they must be laughing at us—but tenderly, as we laugh at the absurdities of a little child, with the laughter that has healing in it instead of bitterness, and pity rather than scorn."

"I wish the present Sir Roger knew as much as they do, then."

"You can hardly expect that," replied the rector, "seeing that they have already lived for several centuries longer than he has."

Mr. Cartwright never said "had" and "was" when speaking of people who were dead, but always "have" and "are." This was because the woman he loved had died, and he still loved her.

"Yet my uncle seems to know a good deal," said Jack wearily.

"Oh dear no! believe me, he really knows very little. He was a Senior Wrangler and I only took a pass degree, but I own I should be ashamed of myself if I did not know more than he does."

Jack brightened up. Mr. Cartwright seemed to be as sensible as the old crusaders and much more companionable.

"You see," continued the rector, "Sir Roger has tried to do without religion and love; and as they are the only two things that really educate a man, your poor uncle is wofully uneducated. That is what is wrong with him."

"Yet he is a clever man."

“Remarkably so; but also totally ignorant of the things that really matter.”

“I think you know more than he does,” Jack said.

“Yes; I have learned that humanity is fine, but that Divinity is infinitely finer; I have learned that sin is strong, but that Grace is infinitely stronger; and I have learned that sorrow goes deep, but that love goes infinitely deeper. I have also learned that many things are good, and that most things are funny.”

“Should you call my uncle funny?”

“Intentionally — moderately so; unintentionally — extremely so. He has made a little garden for himself, well out of reach of the sunshine of human love and the rain of human tears, and has rolled it with heavy and lifeless philosophy, and has planted it with bitter herbs; and he actually believes that that stuffy little back garden is the whole world. Oh! he really is extremely amusing when you come to think of him; and, as I said before, most lamentably ignorant.”

“I wish Sir Roger knew that he is funny,” said Jack vindictively; “it would do him all the good in the world.”

“Oh! dear no, it would not, because he wouldn't believe it; and what you know and don't believe, does you about as much good as a bottle of medicine that stands untasted on your mantelshelf till it dies of inanition and the housemaid. That is what happens to all the bottles of medicine that my doctor ever prescribes for me, and I confess that I am as well without them as with them.”

“Then don't you believe that people ever know that they are unintentionally funny!”

“If they are without a sense of humour they have no idea of the thing. If they are blessed with that precious sense, they know that they must somehow be funny to onlookers; but they could not tell you when nor where, for the life of them. Your uncle belongs to the latter class,

so must be conscious that he is more or less amusing : but I fancy he has no idea how delightfully ridiculous he is."

Jack looked at the rector with increasing interest. He was as yet young enough and foolish enough to believe that extremely good people are also extremely dull people—a common heresy which Philip Cartwright was born to refute.

It would have been impossible for any one to be long in the rector's company without feeling an interest in him ; and Jack Le Mesurier was quite normal.

In the first place Philip Cartwright was a remarkably handsome man—a fact which will always help people to influence their fellows, until those fellows are as blind as the fish in the mammoth caves of Kentucky ; and in the second place he possessed to an unusual degree that magic gift called charm, without which even a handsome man cannot be attractive. He always spoke of himself as "an old bachelor," because he was between forty and fifty years of age, and looked ten years younger ; and he invariably laughed at his own want of scholarship, because he was one of the best-read men in England—just as rich people always talk of their poverty, and well-dressed ones of their shabby clothes. But perhaps the gift which had stood him in best stead in his dealings with men and women, was his intense and wonderful sympathy. Some people called Mr. Cartwright inquisitive ; but these were stupid people who were not endowed with understanding hearts. His was no idle curiosity, but an absorbing interest in anything and everything which affected his fellow-creatures. He had often been angry, but never impatient ; he had often felt weary, but never bored.

Again, stupid people were apt to think him heartless, because he could see the humour in the most pathetic things, and because he was always cheerful, and took encouraging views of life. They did not know that his cheerfulness arose not from ignorance of sorrow, but from

having gone down into the depths of suffering and come out whole on the other side. His was the joyousness of Easter, not of Christmas ; but how could passing acquaintances be expected to understand so nice a distinction as this ? Enough for them that he seemed happy—therefore, they argued, must feel happy ; and consequently, they concluded, he could never have felt anything else. So subtle and satisfactory is the wisdom of this world.

Jack soon fell under the spell of the rector's magnetic personality, without in the least understanding it ; and he had not walked round the quaint old rectory garden three times before he felt constrained to tell Mr. Cartwright the story of Sir Roger's present hard-heartedness.

"I say," he began bluntly, "I wonder if you have ever been worried or bothered about anything. You look so strong and calm that a fellow cannot imagine your being down in the mouth."

Jack had never heard the story of the woman who died at thirty, and was still a girl to Philip Cartwright and always would be. But the rector had only been at Greystone for three years, so the early chapters of his life had not been read and understood of the people there, which perhaps made life all the easier for him.

Mr. Cartwright smiled ; he was used to people's thinking that he had never felt anything, when he knew that he had felt twenty times more than they ever had felt or could feel. "I have had my ups and downs like the rest of us," he said : "I have stood upon Carmel and lain down under the juniper tree, as we all have to do sooner or later."

"Then you understand how a fellow feels when he is worried about things, and doesn't know which way to turn."

"I think I know how a fellow feels when he is worried about things ; but there never is really but one way to turn, and that not the easy and pleasant way, as a rule."

"You mean there is only one right way ?"

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"Precisely; and that is by no means always pleasant walking. Yet to a man, worthy of the name, there is no alternative path."

Then Jack told Mr. Cartwright the story of his love for Ethel, and how hard Sir Roger had been, and how he sometimes wondered if he were justified in asking any woman to share such poverty as his. The rector listened, and sympathized, and understood. It was a good thing for any man to make a friend of Philip Cartwright, for he added to his experience patience, and to patience common sense—not an ordinary combination.

"You see, I don't know if it is fair on a girl to take her out to India with nothing but my pay for us to live on. And yet I couldn't go back again without her," Jack sighed at the end of his story.

"But she knows you are not well off, I suppose; you have never let her believe that you are a prince in disguise, have you?"

"Oh! no, of course not. But she knows I am the next heir to the title, and she may hardly realize how utterly bare that title will be, though I have tried to make her understand."

Some of Sir Roger's bitter little seeds had taken root even in Jack's loyal heart. Mr. Cartwright perceived this, and his eyes twinkled. "I see your uncle's preaching has not been altogether vain."

Jack flushed. "It was not exactly my uncle."

"Pardon me, I think it was. That is the worst of people with evil tongues. They sow nasty poisonous seeds all over the place, like thistles, and some of the thistles always grow up; and there are generally plenty of asses about to enjoy them when they are full grown. I don't wonder that S. James became excited when he began discussing the harm wrought by the human tongue. It is a mischief-making machine!"

"I should be ashamed of myself if I allowed my uncle's hateful remarks to have any influence at all upon me," replied Jack indignantly.

"That you have every reason to be ashamed of yourself I admit; but that does not alter the fact that Sir Roger's words have not altogether left you as they found you. As a matter of fact, nobody's words do; and yet people go peppering them all over the place, utterly unconscious of the awful responsibility they are thereby incurring. As a pretty Irish friend of mine once said to me, 'In throwing mud, even if none of it sticks, some does;' and I know exactly what she meant, and also fully agree with her."

"I suppose you are right."

"I am sure I am in this respect, my dear Le Mesurier, for it is a subject on which I have felt much and thought strongly. People say to you quite casually, 'So-and-so is a regular bounder,' or 'Mrs. So-and-so is a two-faced cat,' or 'Miss So-and-so is a horrid little flirt,' and then go on their way rejoicing, only having really meant that the afore-said trio are not particular friends of theirs; but for the rest of your days you are handicapped by a prejudice against the So-and-sos, which it may take years of friendliness to live down."

"Good gracious! I never thought of the matter in that light."

"People very rarely do, or else there would be less evil wrought in the world than there is at present. But the worst mischief-makers of all are those who have not the pluck to say right out the nasty things they are thinking, and so get behind a third person, and tell you what the latter has said of you. Of course they pretend that the third person's remark has given them acute pain; but you know perfectly well all the time that it is the most delicious morsel they have tasted for weeks."

"I have often met people of that sort," said Jack,

laughing, "and they always look so shocked when they repeat the spiteful speeches."

"I know they do. Isn't it sickening? And the irritating thing about them is that they feel righteous and enjoyable indignation against the folks who have made the nasty remarks in the first place, and have no idea that he who invents a harmful lie is no whit worse than he who loves and circulates it."

"But," Jack said, "you haven't told me whether you think I am justified in keeping Miss Harland to her promise to share my poverty."

It was characteristic of Jack that it never occurred to him whether he were justified in giving up Greystone for Ethel's sake. He thought much of his duty to her—his duty to himself did not enter into his calculations.

The rector thought for a moment. "Yes, I should say you are," he replied. "A woman is not a child, to have everything cut and dried for her: she has as much right as a man to shape her own fate. I think that those men deserve hanging who lay all the burdens of life upon their womankind; but I also think that those men deserve some punishment who refuse to share their burdens with a woman, if she is willing and anxious to share them. It is absurd to feed women entirely on sweetmeats, and lead them only along paths strewn with rose-leaves, and then to rail at them because they are no better than spoiled children; and yet that is what many men, and good men, do."

"I am very glad to hear you say that. Of course I want Ethel awfully, and should find everything beastly without her; but, all the same, I shouldn't like to do anything to her that was not quite fair play. And then, she has never been accustomed to be well off, so she won't mind poverty as much as a girl who has."

Mr. Cartwright smiled. He was enough a man of the world to know that it is the women who have had much

who are content with very little, because they know exactly how little the much is worth ; while the women who have had nothing feel it is their turn now to get everything, and refuse to be content with less. But he was also enough a man of the world not to say all that he knew, when he thought that his knowledge was not of the kind to give pleasure to other people.

“ My dear fellow, marry the woman whom you love and who loves you,” he said ; “ and remember that love in a cottage with a parlour-maid is better than a butler and two footmen and hatred therewith—which is the modern rendering of the dinner of herbs and the stalled ox. Women are adaptable creatures, and dance to whatever tune we choose to pipe. When we treat them as spoilt children they behave as spoilt children, and are extremely tiresome ; when we treat them as angels from heaven they behave as angels from heaven, and are only one degree less tiresome ; and when we treat them as good women they behave as good women, and there is nothing better this side paradise.”

Jack grasped the rector's hand. “ Thanks awfully,” he muttered. “ I shall never forget what you have said.”

Mr. Cartwright was a wise man as well as a clever one, and he had learnt that when one's feelings get to straining point there is nothing so good for one as saving humour. Shallow people misunderstood this, and called the rector flippant ; but those whose feelings went deep understood him better, and knew that his laughter was tenderer than many men's tears, and that it was because he cared so much that he laughed, and not because he cared so little.

“ Come and be presented to my gardener,” he said, laying a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder and leading him across the garden : “ he has a most interesting and instructive personality. While horticulture is his past-time, astrology is his profession ; and he reads more



impossible things in the stars than we do in the newspapers. Clutterbuck, this is Captain Le Mesurier, Sir Roger's nephew."

The gardener looked up from his work and leaned against an old sun-dial in an attitude conducive to conversation.

"Good day, sir, good day, sir," responded Clutterbuck, "glad to make your acknowledgment, I'm sure. Fine morning, sir, very fine morning for the time of year, though these antediluvian frosts make merchandise among the blossoms, and no mistake; but it is the lot of all, sir, the lot of all it is to be cut off in their prime, and none to hinder them."

"This is a very old sun-dial," remarked Jack, by way of making conversation.

"That it is, sir," answered the gardener with the pride of possession; "it is nigh on three hundred years old; and, what is more, it tells the time as well as it did the day it was made. Rather different from the new-fangled watches and clocks they make nowadays, which gain one day and lose the next and stop on the next altogether. They could make better machinery three hundred years ago than they can now, to judge by our sun-dial; for I've never known it either lose or gain—let alone stop—the whole time I've been here. Now that's a bit of good machinery if you like. It has got some real fine works in it, our old sun-dial has."

"Indeed it has," agreed Jack with delight. "And I dare say you get a great deal of sunshine here, to keep its works in order."

But Clutterbuck never allowed himself to be led away into enthusiasm. "Too much, sir; sadly too much, to my thinking; and I know something about it, having worked in the garden, man and boy, for close on sixty years. But what are you to do? One man wants rain, and another

wants sun, and another wants wind; and if everybody had what they wanted, we should soon have no weather at all."

"I suppose rain is now wanted badly," agreed Jack, repressing a smile.

"Rain is wanted, sir, and rain we shall have. You see, sir, saving your presence, Mars and Saturn are in conjunction; and when Mars and Saturn are in conjunction there's always floods and wars and deluges. The year came in with Neptune in the ascendant; and when that happens there are always misfortunes by water, such as wars or tempests or the end of the world or the disestablishment of the Church. The last time the year came in with Neptune in the ascendant, there was a persecution of the Jews; and the time before that, Lord Nelson was killed at Trafalgar; and what the misfortune will be this year only Providence knows, but it will be something tremendous, whoever lives to see it."

And Clutterbuck fairly smacked his lips over the prospect of the coming disaster.

"Let us hope it will not be as dreadful as you expect, Clutterbuck," the rector remarked.

But Clutterbuck was not going to be disappointed of his hopes in that manner.

"What the stars say, that the stars stick to, sir; and them that begins to argufy and make havoc among the planets will get their fingers burnt sooner or later. There has been naught but misfortunes this year up to now; and naught but misfortunes there will be till the conclusion of the whole matter. First, the schools had to be closed because of measles; then the concert of Europe came across one another and there was wars; then Mrs. Higginson's pig died of swine fever; then there was a Parliamentary election in this part of the county, owing to Mr. Fulford being made into a lordship, and a Radical got in in his place; then my missis sprained her thumb with the rolling-pin; and now

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them continual frosses is turning the pear-blossom into so much waste-paper, as the saying is; and yet, sir, you can look me in the face and say that the planets is agreeable to us just at present!" And Clutterbuck gazed at his master with sad and reproachful eyes, as at one incapable of reading the signs of the times.

"There'll be disasters this year," he continued, shaking his head with solemn joy, "great and terrible disasters. My only fear is that we shall not live to see them. I shouldn't be surprised if so many misfortunes happening before May was out, didn't foretell the end of the world; but no man can say for certain, for the end of the world always comes sudden-like as it were, and when it's least expected, so as to be all the more of a warning to them that's frivolous-minded, and to take them by surprise."

"Clutterbuck is a great authority on all matters connected with the stars and the weather," said Clutterbuck's master; "and quite a prophet in his way."

The old man waved his spade in a deprecatory manner. "I dunno about me being a prophet, sir; all I can do is to read the future by the help of the planets," he remarked modestly, as if reading the planets was an accomplishment taught in the elementary schools, and therefore nothing to be proud of; "but then I do consult them on all matters, and they never deceives me. Now my brother William was born under the influence of Mars; and I told him it was his bounden duty to wed a woman born under the influence of Venus, or else there'd be no happiness for neither of them. But William was an obstinate lad and would go his own way, and he married a girl that had been born when Saturn was in the ascendant. And what was the consequences of that regardless act of his? Why, when her father died, it was found that he'd left all his savings—some two hundred pounds or so—to his son, and not a penny to either of his daughters. 'William,' I says, 'it serves you right, and let

it be a warning to you never to marry a woman belonging to a wrong planet in the future.' Which he hasn't done again so far, I must allow ; but that, I fancy, is more owing to his first wife's being still living, than from any respect he felt for my words."

"Then were you equally careful in your own choice of a wife?" asked Jack.

"Certainly, sir, and by all means. And I have chosen my second, too, with equal care."

"I didn't know that Mrs. Clutterbuck was your second wife," the rector said.

"No more she is, sir, no more she is. But I says to her one day, 'Mary Ann,' I says, 'maybe when the time comes for you to be took, I sha'n't be as hale and hearty as I am now, nor have all my wits about me, so I'd better choose her as is to precede you now that I'm clothed and in my right mind, as the saying is.' And Mary Ann saw the purpose of this, as any right-thinking woman would ; for she know'd when I was all in an upset with losing her, and busy with the funeral, I should be in no fit state to choose a suitable wife, and so might make a mistake, being in a hurry as it were to get comfortable and settled again as soon as possible."

The rector looked quite serious, which did him credit. "Of course, Clutterbuck ; a very sensible suggestion on your part, showing great forethought. And pray what did Mrs. Clutterbuck say to the arrangement?"

"Well, sir, she see'd the jest of it just as you do ; and she said she'd give me a helping hand in looking round, as it were ; because women can see through each other with half an eye, as you may say, while they take us in like one o'clock, even when we devote all our attention to their tricks. And I've every confidence in Mary Ann's judgment. At last she says to me, 'Clutterbuck,' she says, 'there's nobody as would look after my furniture as well as Sarah

Maria Stacey ; but if you've any objection to her, say the word, and I'll never mention her name to you again.' 'Mary Ann,' I says, 'you are a woman in a thousand ; Sarah Maria is not what you'd call handsome, maybe, but we are all as Providence made us, and I'm not the one to go throwing any woman's face in her teeth ; and, as you say, she'd leave the furniture better than she found it. If the planets are harmonious—mine and Sarah Maria's that is to say—Sarah Maria shall be the one.' And so I fixed upon Sarah Maria ; and Sarah Maria it shall be when the time comes."

That he himself might predecease the regnant Mrs. Clutterbuck never occurred to the rector's gardener : *place aux dames* was his motto in this case, and he stuck to it.

"Apparently a most suitable appointment," remarked Mr. Cartwright.

Clutterbuck shook his head sorrowfully. "Ay, sir, man app'int's ; but there's One above as disapp'int's."

And his master added with a whimsical smile, "I too have learnt that—by experience."

"Ay, ay," continued Clutterbuck, "Mary Ann's been very obliging over the whole matter ; for as soon as I'd consulted the stars and it was settled, she invited Sarah Maria up to our place and told her how I liked my bacon broiled and what sort of a poultice soothed my rheumatics, so that she'd know my ways when the time came, and not be working in the dark as it were, and putting me about with her foolishness."

"Behold the superiority of the sex to us !" exclaimed Mr. Cartwright. "Henry V. tries the crown on, and there is a row, and Henry IV. makes things generally unpleasant instead of kindly showing his son where the machine wants enlarging and where taking in ; for surely nobody knows where the crown pinches as well as he who

wears it. Then, on the other hand, Miss Stacey tries the crown on, and Mrs. Clutterbuck points out to her how to ease it in the wear, so as to make it the more comfortable to herself and Mr. Clutterbuck. Surely Wisdom makes her abode with Woman, and dwells amidst the feminine portion of the community!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *WHAT ELFRIDA SAID.*

“Some folks are like a mirror fair :  
No ruffles on the surface there  
But all in perfect order ;  
Their presence seems to fill a place  
With light and cheerfulness and grace  
And peace within the border.”

**A**CCORDING to that universal rule whereby when we hear of any special thing or person for the first time we hear of it or him again immediately, Mr. Cartwright ran up to town for a dinner-party at the Silverhamptons' the day after Jack's visit to Greystone, and was selected to take Elfrida Harland down to dinner.

Jack was too much of a gentleman to have told the rector of Elfrida's love for him, though he had made no secret of his uncle's wish that he should marry the late Lord Harland's heiress ; but Mr. Cartwright found it out at once through Elfrida's studied indifference when he mentioned Captain Le Mesurier's name as that of a common acquaintance. It is against nature to be indifferent at the mention of a familiar third person when one is talking to a stranger, as such third' persons are the very foundation stones of Society's temple ; therefore, when such indifference is openly shown, it is safe to conclude that the stranger, whom one is addressing, is either in love with the third person or else owes him money. Which of these two

alternatives happens to be the correct one, can only be discovered by means of the context.

But Philip Cartwright was not to be rebuffed by Miss Harland's coldness. "I am so glad that you know Captain Le Mesurier," he said; "it is so much easier to get on with people after the discovery of a common acquaintance."

"Yes; isn't it? And we are so lucky to have found out our common acquaintance before our soup is cold. I am always sure that the man who takes me in to dinner knows somebody that I do; but as a rule we are lost in the mazes of the second *entrée* before we discover who it is."

"We are not only lucky in having so soon hit upon a common acquaintance, but we are still more fortunate in having so pleasant an acquaintance in common. I have the greatest respect and liking for Captain Le Mesurier, for I do not think I ever met a straighter man, or one with less humbug about him. I cannot stand humbug, can you?"

"Oh dear! yes; in fact, I rather like it," replied Elfrida, who happened to be in a contradictious mood; "humbugs are generally so polite, and pretend that they are being taken in by you, because they want you to be really taken in by them. I cannot endure the people whom I can't take in: they make me feel all thin and transparent, as if I were made of tracing-paper or plate-glass."

"But I think that is a most comfortable feeling. It is a true proverb that to comprehend all is to forgive all; and I am sure that if we could all see each other as we really are, there would be much more affection in the world than there is at present. Besides, if we were made of tracing-paper or plate-glass, there would no longer be any need for explanation; and explanation is, to my mind, the one insupportable thing in life."

"Apology being the other," added Elfrida. "In my opinion the people who explain and the people who apologize ought to be hung up on gibbets at four cross-



roads ; for explanations always increase a difficulty, just as apologies invariably heighten an offence."

"There, you see, you really agree with me ; for apology is either a meaningless habit on the part of timid, deprecating persons, who are so busy effacing themselves that they have no time to attend to other people ; or else it is merely a form of humbug. If we really felt friendly towards people, we shouldn't be rude to them ; and if we haven't been rude to them, what is there to apologize about ?"

"An apology means that we know that we have been rude to them, but we hope they do not."

"Exactly ; and that is humbug," said Mr. Cartwright. "Then there is that other form of humbug called affectation. Surely you cannot defend that."

"No ; that is bad, I admit, and most especially that form of it which is ashamed of the truth because it doesn't consider the truth 'genteel.' Take fussy old maids, for instance, who think it vulgar to call a spade a spade, and so dub it a teaspoon ; and snobs, who are ashamed of the spades with which their fathers dug, and call them presentation trowels."

"All the same," Philip said gently, "I think I am a little sorry for the people who go through life trying to make their world believe that all their spades are either silver teaspoons or presentation trowels ; it is uphill work. It means that they are ashamed of their antecedents, and want to sponge them out ; and antecedents take an unconscionable lot of sponging."

"But I despise people who are ashamed of their antecedents."

"I never said they were not despicable ; I only said they were a little pitiable as well."

Elfrida shook her head. "I cannot pity them, they are so intrinsically vulgar. I presume there are spades in most families shut up in cupboards along with the family skeletons.

A gentleman shows you his spade, still begrimed with honest soil, and tells you that therewith his grandfather dug and found a fortune. A snob has his spade electro-plated, and tells you that it was presented to his grandfather for laying some hypothetical municipal stone."

"Your illustration is most happy. As you say, no man ought to be ashamed of anything but of being ashamed."

"You see there is hardly anything vulgar in itself; it is only vulgar when it pretends to be anything else. It isn't vulgar to keep a carriage, and it isn't vulgar not to keep a carriage; but it is terribly vulgar to talk about one's carriage while one is shaking the straw of the humble four-wheeler off one's feet."

"But all affectations are not vulgar," argued Mr. Cartwright; "as, for instance, the sort you illustrated by calling a spade a teaspoon. It may be silly and sentimental and tiresome, but it is not in the least vulgar; in fact it errs on the opposite side, and is over-refined."

"I hate it."

"I don't. It is a type of affectation which belonged to the last generation, and has now practically ceased to exist. Of course it was foolish; but I don't think it was half as bad as the modern affectation of naturalness, which not only calls a spade a spade when necessary, but is always dragging spades into the conversation. I am sure in these days of unreserve, when women spend their lives in studying the art of being natural, one yearns sometimes for the old-fashioned mincers who fainted at an offer and screamed at a mouse. After all, they knew that they were being affected; a fact of which the New Woman seems to be unconscious."

"Then does knowing of a thing make it any the less hideous?"

Mr. Cartwright smiled. "At any rate, it precludes self deception."

"Well, it does; that is true. Just as the people with no

hot-water pipes in their houses, know that their rooms are cold, and so have big fires ; and the people who have pipes crawling along their passages like warm snakes, generally think they can do without a fire, and then forget to turn the hot water on, and so freeze their friends to death."

"Precisely. It is something to know the truth, even if one has not the courage to preach it."

"Nevertheless," persisted Elfrida, "I prefer modern affectations to antique ones, just as I prefer a *toupe* to an old-fashioned front. Nowadays women wear *toupés* to make themselves look young, and their grandmothers wore fronts to make themselves look old—equally reprehensible tricks in the eye of the realist. Though a *toupe* may be false, it is still fair, and presumably makes the wearer better-looking ; but miniature window-curtains of snuff-coloured horsehair, attached to a cornice of black velvet, could never have been a becoming setting for 'the human face divine.' Now could they?"

"Please do not ask me : such things are too high for my poor masculine intelligence. But of all forms of affectation the one that I least comprehend is an insane habit some really excellent persons have of pretending that they are much worse than they really are. Doesn't it puzzle you when you come across it?"

Elfrida nodded acquiescence, although she habitually fell into that same snare herself. "Awfully. Shakespeare told us to assume a virtue if we had it not, and he was an old humbug for suggesting such a course, though a wise old humbug ; but to assume a vice when we have it not, appears to me to be idiotic. Yet scores of people do it. Good creatures, who were made to be the pillar of a sewing-meeting, will tell you they adore pleasure and hate children, and have all the vices of the professional beauty ; while conscientious souls, who wouldn't miss an evening service to save their lives, will shake a tea-party to its

foundations with the jargon of the professed atheist. It is very funny."

"And very sad, too, for it hinders people from winning the amount of affection which is their due; and our happiness in this world is pretty fairly measured by the amount of affection which we receive."

"Mr. Cartwright," interrupted Lady Silverhampton, who was sitting on the rector's other side, "we are halfway through dinner—*my* dinner, you will notice—and you haven't spoken to me once; and there is the man at Miss Harland's right hand looking as if he wanted to choke you. You really must behave better than this, or I shall not ask you to dinner again. I put you next to me because I had to let Lord Saltyre take me in, as he is the biggest swell here; but he is too learned and clever for me altogether, and I told Silverhampton I must have an antidote on the other side, or else I should have brain-fever by the time we got to the sweets. And this is how my antidote behaves!"

"I am so sorry to have made such a poor return for so great a compliment; but I will refrain from apologizing, as Miss Harland and I have just decided that we disapprove of apologies on principle."

"And quite right; they are stupid things, I think. I never apologized in my life, because I never did anything I was sorry for. I don't do a thing unless I want to do it; and if I wanted to do it I can't be sorry for having done what I wanted, can I? Nobody could."

Mr. Cartwright smiled. "I am afraid they can be, and are."

"Well, I haven't the strength left to argue, but I know I am right. You wouldn't have the strength left to argue if you had been talking to old Saltyre all this time instead of to Elfrida Harland. You needn't be afraid he'll hear," her ladyship added, as Philip glanced anxiously towards the peer under discussion; "he is deaf on this side, as

I know to my cost. I simply yelled into his ear one of my best stories about a collection at Grasslands church; and when I had finished, instead of laughing, he asked, 'And who won the election, did you say?' I could have flung the salt-cellar in his face, I felt so furious."

"It certainly was trying for you."

"But that wasn't the worst. He would tell me all about some schools he had built on his estate, to teach somebody to do something—I forget what—till I wished I was deaf instead of him. He is the most awful man for statistics. If once he is started, he will tell you exactly how many pins a South Sea Islander swallows in a year, and how many children are eaten by tigers on the Tottenham Court Road, and how many bishops a dissenting-chapel will hold, till your head fairly spins. It is going in to dinner with men such as this that makes a woman old before her time!"

"I must congratulate myself on being much more fortunate than my hostess," said Mr. Cartwright; "for I have enjoyed sitting next to Miss Harland as much as you have not enjoyed sitting next to Lord Saltyre."

"I am so glad; isn't she a delightful girl?"

"I think she is perfectly charming. She is a great beauty and a great heiress, and yet she is as easy to get on with as if she were neither," the rector answered, having first made sure that Elfrida was sufficiently engaged in talking to her right-hand neighbour not to hear what he said.

"No, you are out of it there; she isn't as easy to get on with as if she were not a great heiress. I don't mean that she gives herself airs on account of her fortune; there isn't the slightest bit of money-rubbish about Elfrida; but so many men have wanted her for the sake of her fortune, that she has ceased to believe that any one could care for her for her own sake."

"But how absurd! And when she is so nice, too!"

"It is perfectly idiotic of her, I know; but that is how she feels, and it has made her grow bitter and cynical and sarcastic. Now I should never have felt like that, however rich I might have been: I should always have been sure that Silverhampton loved me for the pure and simple reason that I was the very opposite of his mother, quite apart from any pecuniary considerations. You knew old Lady Silverhampton, didn't you? Wasn't she awful?"

"She certainly was a very terrific old lady," agreed the rector.

"She always considered me a most disgraceful character, because I wouldn't come down in a morning before the housemaids had lighted the fires, and because I never went to sleep on a Sunday afternoon."

"I can sympathize with you, Lady Silverhampton; for she once lectured me before a whole roomful of people for not propounding the doctrines of Calvin. She said I was 'loose,' whatever that may mean."

"Oh dear! oh dear! There is that tiresome old Lord Saltrye turning a deaf ear to me, and I must fulfil my duties as a hostess and pour something into it. What shall I talk to him about? I know whatever things I mention, he will tell me how they are made; and I do so hate to know how things are made, don't you? I remember once seeing how chocolate and felt-hats were made at some exhibition—the Healtheries or the Wealtheries or something—and I have loathed chocolate and felt-hats ever since. I'll ask him how fortunes are made—that will be worth knowing, won't it? So here goes. Lord Saltrye, Mr. Cartwright and I want to know if you can tell us how fortunes are made?"

"How what are made, Lady Silverhampton? I did not quite catch what you said."

"Fortunes—fortunes: things that you marry for and then are disappointed in, don't you know?"

"How fortunes are made? Ah! that is a large question. They are made, of course, in three ways—by labour, by commerce, and by accumulation." ("I told you he would have an answer ready, and a dull one," whispered Lady Silverhampton to Philip; "he always does.") "Those of course do not include such fortunes as are inherited, and which, I should say, form the bulk of property in this country. It would be interesting to find out which of these three includes the largest number. I should be inclined to say that money which accumulates increases more rapidly than money gained in any other way; though it is a nice point whether you can consider an unearned increment as money that is made. I should be inclined to say not."

Then Elfrida turned to Mr. Cartwright with a question: "Do you really think the most popular people are the happiest people?" She had been thinking over his last remark all through her conversation with her right-hand neighbour; consequently this latter was not without justification for his inward comment that it was a pity good-looking women were frequently so uninteresting to talk to.

"Roughly speaking, yes," replied the rector.

"But the question is whether the popular person is *nascitur* or *fit*," said Elfrida thoughtfully.

"Dr. Johnson said that 'genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains': I think the same remark applies to popularity."

"A more modern writer than Dr. Johnson says that 'genius is an infinite capacity for doing things without taking pains'; and I should say, rather, that popularity is like that."

"As a matter of fact," Philip remarked, "I think that both these descriptions apply to popularity, though I am bound to confess that your anonymous friend was nearer the mark with regard to genius than was the worthy doctor.

I once heard a very brilliant woman say that genius knows by intuition what ordinary human nature has to learn by experience."

Elfrida laughed. "Now I should define that as the difference between a man and a woman: a man knows everything that is in books, and a woman knows everything that is not."

"It is a good thing that she does; for, as far as I can make out, no woman is capable of learning anything from experience."

"That is true enough. I am absolutely innocent of Applied Mathematics or of the date of the Second Punic War; but I know to a teaspoonful how much contradiction a man can bear without losing his temper, and the psychological moment when a lady of fashion should put on the old woman, and take to violet-powder and amiability in place of soap-and-water and caprice."

"Then, if you know all that, you ought to know whether popularity—*alias* happiness—is an acquired art or a natural gift."

"I should say a natural gift," replied Elfrida, "like everything else that is worth having."

"And I should say an acquired art, founded upon the one great gift which lies at the root of so many Christian and social virtues—namely, the power of putting oneself in another person's place."

"That is sympathy."

Philip Cartwright smiled. "Excuse me, it is something infinitely greater; it is the very essence of love and of friendship."

"It appears to me that friendship is nothing but an immense capacity for not being bored, and that love is an infinite capacity for not being bored. That is all that they really amount to, if you strip them of sentiment and resolve them into their integral parts."



"My dear Miss Harland, for pity's sake don't begin resolving things into their integral parts. It is a most dangerous habit, and soon reduces art to a mere paint-box, love to an attack of nerves, and religion to a survival of fetichism. It is not only mathematically accurate in its deductions, it is also absolutely untrue."

Elfrida laughed, as a woman generally does when a man reproves her. "I am afraid that you are very sentimental."

"Am I? Well, there are worse things than being sentimental; and I am thankful to say that I have no objection to saying what I think and showing what I feel, and of generally being what certain of the Stoics would call 'cheap.'"

"There I think you are quite right: the people who are so dreadfully afraid of being too cheap are in great danger of failing to make themselves sufficiently dear. But though I also do not object to cheapness so-called, I cannot help seeing that nobody is without faults and nobody is without virtues; and that the sensible man is the man who keeps his eyes fixed upon the virtues of his friends and the faults of his enemies, and who doesn't bother his head about putting himself in anybody's place."

Philip Cartwright shook his head. "You don't really think that, and you know that you don't. It is only by putting oneself in another person's place that one learns how small things affect him; and every day is a day of small things."

"That is true. Great things happen only once or twice in a lifetime, while small things are turning up fifty times every day before lunch. And small things are really the most important, as you say; for I believe that a man is fonder of the woman who laughs at his jokes (at the poor ones, I mean) than of the woman who worships his moral excellencies and his intellectual gifts. I know lots of good, loving, conscientious people, who sacrifice themselves on

the shrine of friendship, and are always spending and being spent for their friends; yet because they have an unfortunate knack of saying the wrong things, and of telling unflattering truths, all their devotion and self-sacrifice count for nothing, and nobody can bear them."

"And on the other hand," added Mr. Cartwright, "the good-tempered, easy, agreeable people, who never put themselves out of their way to oblige anybody, and yet have a trick of making flattering little speeches and doing pleasant little things which give them no trouble, are adored by all who know them, and earn more gratitude in a week than the others earn in a lifetime."

"It seems hard and unjust, doesn't it?" said Elfrida.

"It is neither one nor the other," replied the rector; "if the unselfish people took as much trouble to be pleasant as the selfish ones do, they would be far the more popular of the two; but they are too proud to stoop to small things, and so are deservedly punished. When they are asked to do some great thing, they are ready and willing to comply; but they are so busy thinking of their deep Abanas and Pharpars that they have not patience to trouble themselves about those small streams of Jordan which make glad the commonplace lives of commonplace people.

"Then I am right after all, and popularity is not an acquired art; for the people who attend to small things are the tactful people, and tact is certainly a natural gift."

"Pardon me, Miss Harland, it is I who am right after all. Tact can be—and ought to be—acquired; though, like amiability or generosity or any other virtue, some people are naturally more largely endowed with it than others. We ought not to excuse a man for being by nature tactless, any more than we should excuse him for being by nature selfish; for tact is merely the outward form of that inward grace we call unselfishness."

"Then how would you train people to be tactful?"

"I would teach them moral perspective—that is to say, the power of looking at things from another person's point of view, whereby they will learn to see stones of stumbling and rocks of offence, which otherwise would have been hid from them ; and, seeing, to avoid the same."

It was a very long dinner. There was every imaginable delicacy, except those which happened to be in season, hot ; and then an *encore* of all those unseasonable delicacies, cold. There was iced fruit with the boiled ham, and hot sauce with the ices, and everything else that was nasty and fashionable and unexpected. But Miss Harland and her new friend did not mind the length of the dinner, they got on so well together.

When at last the beginning of the end, in the form of dessert, was upon the table, Mr. Cartwright said : "I suppose you are tired of being told that it is very pleasant to sit next to you at dinner ; otherwise I should like to state the fact."

"Oh dear, no ! I'm not. There are three things that no one gets tired of hearing, however often they are repeated ; namely, the note of the cuckoo, the fact that one is a charming person, and the information that it is a fine day."

Philip laughed ; and his laugh was delightful, as Elfrida had already discovered. It was the sort of laughter that shakes a man and makes the tears come into his eyes ; not the lifeless *ha-ha* of well-behaved persons, which has about as much real fun in it as a dictionary has, and which appears to be used more for the purposes of punctuation than as a sign of amusement.

"You are such a strong, cheerful, refreshing sort of person," Elfrida added, rising from her seat as the hostess was "collecting eyes," "that you remind me of the *Morning Song* in Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*. It seems as if it were always morning with you."

And then she gathered up her fan and gloves, and swept out of the room in the procession of departing ladies.

Philip smiled, and his smile was sorrowful. "Always morning with me, is it?" he said to himself; "perhaps so. But it is the next morning: my day is over."

From that evening Mr. Cartwright felt the strongest interest in both Jack and Elfrida. In the first place they were young; and youth was always a wonderful thing in Philip's eyes. Certainly extreme and enthusiastic youth sometimes tired him, but that did not make it any the less wonderful. What is more tiring than machinery in motion at an exhibition? Yet what, after all, is more wonderful than such machinery? The rector of Greystone was still young enough to remember that his own youthfulness had never proved tiresome to him; not owing to any conceit on his part, but to his perfect comprehension of his own young thoughts. Whereby he had learnt that the real reason why people find more excuses for their own faults than for the faults of their neighbours, is that they know all about the one and by no means all about the other; and that therefore, when humanity knows even as it is known, there will be no more severe judgments, no more spiteful criticisms, but perfect knowledge will ensure perfect charity.

In spite of his forty odd years, and his more than forty odd sorrows, Philip Cartwright used to say that he had never begun to grow old and foolish, but was still young and wise.

The day after the dinner-party Jack Le Mesurier screwed up his courage to the sticking-point for the second time, and called at the house in Mayfair. On this occasion Fate granted him no remand, but ushered him straight into Miss Harland's presence.

Elfrida, strange to say, was extremely nervous—more nervous than she had ever felt before during the triumphal

procession of her five-and-twenty years. She seemed hardly the same person as the self-possessed woman of the world who had exchanged repartees with Philip Cartwright the preceding evening. Thus does love rival conscience in making cowards of us all; and the metamorphoses of Ovid are as nothing in comparison with those of Cupid.

She and Jack were frightened of each other; so, both being equally afraid, the man showed it the least.

After they had duly inquired after each other's well-being, and commented on the weather, Jack said:

"I called while you were at Eastbourne, and I have come again to-day, to tell you a piece of news about myself: I am engaged to be married to your sister."

There was a moment's pause. Elfrida's heart beat so fast that she thought it would choke her, and there was a horrible ringing in her ears. Never had she loved Jack so well as she did then, when he stood up like a man, with a look upon his face which no woman could mistake, and declared that the girl he loved had promised to marry him; and she felt a spasm of pity for her sister, when she pictured the cup of ordinary human happiness that might have been Ethel's and yet now could never be.

"I have loved Ethel ever since the first time we met," Jack continued; "and I think I am the luckiest fellow alive to have won her. Though how she can care for such a stupid beggar as I am, beats me altogether."

"Are you quite sure that she does care for you?" Elfrida's voice was strained and unnatural.

"Yes; I don't deserve it, heaven knows! But she does."

"You are fortunate, Captain Le Mesurier, in having chosen a woman in whom you can believe so implicitly, and who you feel confident will never deceive you."

Jack looked up quickly: the sneer in Elfrida's tone was unmistakable.

“What do you mean?” he asked shortly. He was loyal to his heart’s core, and he failed to understand how any woman could speak of her sister as Elfrida spoke of Ethel. If only he had been so fortunate as to have a sister, he would never have treated her thus, he thought. But the man who hopes to understand a woman, is only one degree less sanguine than the woman who hopes to understand a man.

“Oh! nothing; nothing, at least, that I am at liberty to explain. I was only wondering if you would ever forgive your dear Ethel if you did happen to find out that she was not quite so ingenuous as you had supposed.”

Miss Harland tried to speak lightly; but there was an anxious eagerness under her banter which she failed entirely to hide. She could not help seeing what a tremendous difference it would make to her if Jack did refuse to forgive Ethel.

“We will not discuss that, if you please,” he said.

“So you believe in her absolutely?”

“Absolutely.”

Elfrida turned away to hide the tears in her eyes. “Then there is nothing left to be said; except for me to wish that you may be as happy as you deserve to be, and your wife more so.”

Jack’s brow grew very black. “Pardon me, there is still this to be said, that I pray and beseech you to put all this foolish secrecy aside, and to treat your sister as my future wife has every right to be treated.”

“That is precisely what I am unable to do.” Elfrida had again assumed her mask of slightly bored indifference.

“Oh! Miss Harland, do for once be merciful.”

“There is no question of mercifulness in the matter.”

“But there is,” Jack pleaded; “if not for Ethel’s sake, won’t you do it for mine, as you and I have been very good friends?”

"I tell you, I can do nothing."

"Miss Harland—Elfrida—why will you be so hard? It is cruel to neglect her, my brave uncomplaining little girl, who has never had any pleasure in her life as yet!"

Again Elfrida's eyes filled with tears which she strove to hide. It was strange how Jack's tenderness towards Ethel always moved her, and she was irritated with herself for thus giving way.

"You are asking an impossibility, Captain Le Mesurier."

"No, not an impossibility. Of course I am not asking you for money. Great heavens! do you think that any man worthy of the name would stoop so low as that? What do you take me for? By all means carry out Lord Harland's wishes with regard to his property; but for pity's sake give your only sister the protection of your home and of your friendship, until I can marry her and take her out to India."

"I have told you that it is impossible."

"And I tell you that it is not impossible," cried Jack, striding up and down the room in the fierceness of his anger; "how can it be impossible for any woman to be kind to her own sister?"

For one moment Elfrida felt a wild impulse to tell Jack the reason why she and Ethel were so widely and impassably separated, and to see, once for all, what effect the truth would have upon him. But she controlled herself, and merely replied, "It is."

Jack was very angry. Elfrida's attitude was incomprehensible to him, as it was to all who did not know Ethel's secret. And he felt that Ethel was so superior to her sister, that it was Elfrida who would gain by the establishment of friendly relations between the twins.

"I think you once told me," he argued, "that although Lord Harland separated you and your sister in the first instance, it is not his doing that you are kept apart now. Is that so?"

Elfrida bowed.

"I have also heard," Jack continued, "that you have been quite independent ever since you came of age, and entirely your own mistress."

"That likewise is true."

"And yet you never see your only sister, never write to her! Miss Harland, answer me truly, is such conduct justifiable?"

"Not only justifiable, but unavoidable; and you would say so yourself if you knew the truth. But you don't know it, and I am not going to tell it to you—at any rate, not now."

Jack threw back his head impatiently. This woman infuriated him with her cold persistence. And yet, indignant as he was, he could not help feeling the fascination of her, and the necessity of steeling himself against this fascination for Ethel's sake. Had Ethel been as wealthy as Elfrida, it is possible that Jack might have allowed the latter to take the place of the former in his affections, as the more he saw of her the more she attracted him. But Ethel's poverty held him fast with the indomitable strength of weakness, which is the strongest thing in the world.

"You don't even know where your sister is, nor what she is doing," he said roughly.

Elfrida smiled an inscrutable smile. "No, I certainly do not; and, for the matter of that, neither do you. Yet you profess to have Ethel's welfare and interests very much at heart."

This retort fairly staggered Jack. Its bare truth hit him straight in the face, and he could not ward off the blow.

Seeing this, Elfrida pursued her advantage. "If ignorance of Ethel's way of living is such a crime in her sister, how is it that her lover is not better informed? If it is so wrong of me never to go and see her, why are you so successfully kept away? Surely the goose's sauce is also suitable for the gander."



## A Double Thread

Elfrida was a plucky woman by nature, and belonged, moreover, to that class of society which counts a bright face and a brave heart as amongst the hall-marks of good breeding, and which would no more talk about its sorrows in public than about its servants; and this not from any lack of acquaintance with these diverse blessings in disguise, but from an ingrained and cultivated knowledge of the utter evilness of boredom.

Nevertheless, though her words might be light, her eyes were heavy with unshed tears, and her voice quivered now and again under its studied carelessness.

"I never pretended to love my sister," she continued; "how could I, when I have never seen her within my memory, but was parted from her when we were both little babies? Yet it seems to me that you, for all your boasted affection, know even less about her than I do. And then you empty upon me the vials of your wrath because I do not know more. It strikes me that you are a little unreasonable."

"All men in love are unreasonable."

"Possibly; but diagnosing a complaint does not cure it. Supposing, now, that I were to agree to grant your request and to go straight to my sister. Where should I find her?"

Jack's face was somewhat blank as he replied: "I—I—don't know."

"Neither do I."

Jack renewed his hasty strides up and down the room. "I simply cannot believe it, Miss Harland."

"I do not expect you to believe it; but it is nevertheless true."

"It is impossible to believe it—absolutely impossible."

"That may be; but haven't you learnt by this time that the impossible happens even more frequently than the unexpected?" Elfrida replied in her old didactic manner.

Jack came up to where she was sitting, and laid his big

hand beseechingly upon her arm. "You know more than I do," he said simply; "please tell me all that you know."

The eyes that Elfrida raised to his thrilled him through and through, they were so exactly like Ethel's. "Would you let another woman tell you what the woman you love has chosen to keep from you? Surely it is every woman's right to tell her own secrets to the man she loves."

"Yes, yes; you are right. Forgive me for asking such a question; and forget that I asked it. I should be a mean hound if I let another woman tell me what Ethel herself has chosen to keep back. I trust her absolutely, and I will trust her to the death. Thank you for recalling me to my better self."

Again Elfrida's resolution wavered. "Listen," she said suddenly; "I will tell you Ethel's secret now, if you bid me do so. If you give the word, my sister's secret shall be yours, and all mystery shall be at an end between us. It is for you to decide."

She meant to abide by his decision whatever it was; but she knew beforehand what his decision would be.

Jack shook his head. "No, no; I will hear her secret from her own lips or not at all. As I have told you, I trust her absolutely."

"Trust her less and love her more; that is my advice, and I think you will need it before you have done."

"I don't know what you mean; but I do know that whatever your sister has done, and whatever she has concealed, I will marry her in the face of the whole world. Nothing shall come between us."

Elfrida's eyes flashed, and her voice shook with suppressed emotion. Like all real women, she knew a real man when she saw one, and did reverence to the vision.

"Listen to me," she said; "you can never marry my sister—never! Take my word for it, and give up the woman you love before it goes any further and you learn

to care too much ; or else, when you find her out, it will break your heart. After all, what is her suffering compared with yours ? As long as you are happy, it is of no consequence what disappointment she may have to bear. And whatever suffering comes to her she deserves it, for she has deceived the best and truest man in the whole world."

But Jack was not to be moved. "I swear that I will never give Ethel up," he cried.

"And I swear that you will never marry her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *ETHEL'S GIFT.*

“Do you know that the ways you pass by  
Where the stream of the traffic is flowing,  
Are like ladders that lead to the sky,  
Whereon angels are coming and going?”

**T**HE tongues of the good ladies of Sunnydale fulfilled in every respect the expectations of S. James the Less; so much so, in fact, that Mrs. Morgan, who had borne a bold front against the attacks of age and penury, laid down her arms at last and succumbed. The truth of Mark Antony's utterance respecting the longevity of “the evil that men do” and the early burial of the good, is proved over and over again in the case of the Mrs. Browns and the Mrs. Cottles of this present world; for the evil reports that they spread, out of sheer mental idleness, blossom and bear fruit, long after the unbleached and uncomfortable garments, which they simultaneously fashion for their poorer brethren, have vanished into dust or the pawn-shop.

So it was with the really well-meaning—if too conversational—matrons of Sunnydale; and so it is with all of us who carefully wash the outside of the cup and the platter, and then use the same for dishing up such spicy morsels of gossip as the real or imagined shortcomings of our neighbours can supply us with. Yet we have all read S. Paul's views as to the importance of charity, and are aware that

religion, in conjunction with an unbridled tongue, held but a poor place in the estimation of S. James. But we are wonderfully adaptable, and make our religion even more so.

Thus it came to pass that poor old Mrs. Morgan broke down under the prying eyes and spiteful tongues of Sunnydale, and confided the same to her granddaughter when the latter arrived to spend her summer holidays.

"The long and the short of it is that I can bear no more," she concluded, wiping the slow tears of age from her tired eyes. "Those dreadful women talk, talk, talk, till it is misery to live among them. You will have to tell them the truth, my dear, or else let us leave the neighbourhood; and your grandfather and I are getting full old to move."

"Oh, granny, not yet—please not yet. I am so happy just now, and I have never been really happy in my life before. Do let me live in my fool's paradise a little longer."

"Well, it is a fool's purgatory to me."

Ethel came up to her grandmother and kissed her. "I am so sorry, dear granny. But don't you think you could bear it a little longer? It means so much to me."

"I suppose I must; but it seems a pity that you do not make a clean breast of the whole affair, and tell the truth once for all. Why don't you?"

"Because I am afraid I should lose Jack if I did."

"Do you mean to say that you think he will break off the engagement when he finds out all about you?"

"Yes."

"If he does he is a fool."

Ethel sighed. "Most men are, but you have to allow for that in dealing with them."

"Oh, my dear, what an unwomanly thing to say!"

"I mean that they are fools in the nice sense; that is to say, they have consciences and senses of honour, and hate lies. Oh dear! oh dear! I wish I had told Jack all about myself before we became engaged."

"So do I, with all my heart. I told you so in the first instance, but you would not listen to me, and now you are caught in your own net. Of course he will be angry, I cannot deny that ; and he will do well to be angry."

"I wonder if he would have been angry if I had told him at first," said Ethel.

"I don't see how he could have been. He might have disapproved of all this play-acting business, and have preferred that his future wife should have kept clear of anything of the kind ; but I don't see how he could have been angry. You had a perfect right to do what you liked, as long as you were independent ; but as soon as you ceased to be independent, you had no right to keep from him what you had been doing."

"But I don't believe he ever would have proposed to me if he had known the truth about me."

Mrs. Morgan shook her head. "Then it was very wrong of you to let him propose to you without knowing the truth, and still more wrong of you to accept him. I cannot imagine how you ever came to do such a thing—I really cannot."

Ethel hung her head penitently. "It certainly was foolish of me."

"Foolish indeed ! It was something much worse than foolish, my dear. In fact it was not acting fairly towards the man who had done you the honour to ask you to be his wife ; for, looked at from his point of view, it was an honour for a gentleman in Captain Le Mesurier's position to propose to the granddaughter of a poor organist."

Ethel's face glowed. "Yes, granny, you are right, it was an honour ; and I shall be grateful to him for paying me such a compliment as long as I live." And she held up her head with the pride that a woman always feels when she knows that she is crowned with a good man's love.

"Well, then, you have a funny way of showing your

gratitude ; that is all I can say. I wonder he doesn't feel more curiosity as to how you spend your time when you are not at Sunnydale, and where your income comes from ; for he must know that Septimus and I could not afford to keep you."

"I begged him to trust me, and not to ask me any questions," Ethel explained.

"Humph ! He trusts you more than I should do in his place ; I will say that for him."

"He thinks I am a governess. Just picture me as a governess, training small children in the way that they should go ! Isn't it killing ?" And Ethel fairly bubbled over with laughter at the image she thus conjured up.

"I should pity the small children that were governessed by you, my dear," replied Mrs. Morgan, somewhat grimly.

"You are very rude, granny ; they would have a delightful time."

"More delightful than educational, I should imagine."

"I don't know about that. I could teach them a lot more than they would learn from an ordinary governess ; I can promise you that."

"Of a sort," said Mrs. Morgan ; "but I don't know that it is a sort that would do them much good. You know too much of the world and its ways, my dear, for your age. I was saying so only yesterday to your grandfather."

"And what did he say ?"

"Oh ! he said that in his eyes you were perfect, as your mother was before you. That is just like Septimus : he spoilt poor Milly, and he is spoiling you."

"Dear grandfather !" said Ethel softly.

"But now we are dealing with things as they are, and not with things as they would have been if you were as simple and straightforward as I was at your age," said Mrs. Morgan ; "of course Captain Le Mesurier will be angry when he discovers the truth, but I don't see that it follows he will break off the engagement."

"I wish I could do something that would ensure his love and forgiveness," sighed Ethel. Then she started, as an idea suddenly came into her head. She knew the legend of the famous Harland diamond; it was a popular and well-known story; but until now she had never paid much attention to it.

"I dare say he would get over the shock in time," persisted Mrs. Morgan.

"You don't know him as well as I do, granny."

"Naturally; but I know that a man is always ready to find excuses for the woman he loves."

Ethel tossed her head scornfully. She had altered much of late; had grown harder and bitterer and more like Elfrida in her ways. Love is certainly a successful schoolmaster, but the lessons that he teaches do not invariably make for amiability.

"I hate excuses," she said; "nothing is really inexcusable save an excuse."

"Tut-tut, child, don't be so highy-tighty. It is better not to have need of excuses, I admit; but a girl who has done what you have done, must remember that excuses are better than wholesale condemnation; and you are bound to get one or the other."

"Heigho! I wish I had never been such a fool."

"That is what most folks are wishing," replied Mrs. Morgan, "and it is sheer waste of time. The best thing is to accept one's own folly, and try to make the best of a bad job."

"By which you mean that if you were in my place you would tell Jack straight out that I am nothing but an actress, as my mother was before me," said Ethel bitterly.

"Don't abuse your poor mother, my dear; she never made any secret about what she was. If I had been in your place I should never have told Captain Le Mesurier



anything but the truth from the beginning. I might have done something else equally unwise, but never that."

"But, granny, I must be happy just a little longer."

Mrs. Morgan sighed. "Very well, my dear; but you will have to tell him before you are married. You could never let a man marry you with his eyes shut."

"If men didn't marry with their eyes shut, they would never marry at all."

"You know what I mean. That is mere quibbling. You must tell Captain Le Mesurier all about yourself before you marry him; and if you don't, I shall."

Ethel's pretty face grew anxious. "Oh! no, no. You promised you would never betray me."

"And I don't mean to betray you if I can possibly help it. As I have told you, I hate the whole affair, and entirely disapprove of it; but I will keep your secret until I feel that I am guilty of actual sin in so doing. Still I will let you marry no man under false pretences, and I hope you will understand this once for all."

"Very well, dear old granny. If you will go on keeping the secret for a few weeks longer, I will promise to tell Jack before we are married. But I don't believe, in that case, that we shall ever be married at all." And Ethel's face grew very sad.

Ethel went up to London for the day soon after this; and when she returned she invited Jack to Sunnydale, and there told him as much of her grandmother's perplexities as she thought it good for him to know. That is to say, she informed him of the gossip about her, and how unhappy it made the old people; but she did not think it necessary to add Mrs. Morgan's injunctions as to the importance of letting him know how matters actually stood.

Jack treated the matter in a thoroughly delightful, and masculine, and inefficient manner. He said that "the old cats' mouths ought to be stopped," and even went so far as

to suggest performing this desirable if difficult operation himself, though how it was to be accomplished neither he nor anybody else had the slightest idea. He was still young enough to prescribe the impossible as a cure for the unpleasant.

Of course he could not "stop the old cats' mouths"; what man ever could? And the attitude of Sunnydale towards Ethel was so disagreeable to him that he finally could bear it no longer, but carried her off to Silverhampton, on a visit to his great-aunt Camilla. Ethel herself did not care much about the gossip, and was more amused than indignant thereat; but she was sorry when she saw how it hurt both Jack and her grandmother, and so was willing to fall in with their wishes and go away again for a time. She and her grandfather enjoyed many a laugh together over the things which were said about her. They both possessed the artistic temperament; and the artistic temperament—whatever may be its disadvantages—always ensures its possessors against two evil things, namely the fear of man and the love of money.

For there is nothing which makes people so strong as not caring about a thing; and there is nothing which makes people not care about a thing except caring about something else. This is why the true artist and the true saint alike dwell in a land of promise as in a strange country, following not after the flesh-pots of Egypt, and fearing not the wrath of kings; for they both endure as seeing that which is invisible.

It is only when Orpheus sings that the notes of the Sirens lose their power to charm.

But though Ethel laughed at the gossip about herself, she did not laugh at the facts. Day and night they stared her in the face, and gave her no peace; for the better she knew Jack, the more clearly she understood that a deception was the one thing that he would not forgive. Moreover, Jack was

not a clever man ; and Ethel had learnt that the more easy it is to take a person in, the more difficult it is afterwards to obtain that person's forgiveness. Had Jack been harder to deceive, he would have been readier to pardon the deceit. That a thief is the proper person to catch a thief has long been admitted by proverbial philosophy ; but it is a co-relative truth that only a thief can enter into the temptations and appreciate the successes of his fellow-purloiners ; which principle applies to many other things than the breach of the Eighth Commandment.

Therefore Ethel realized more and more fully that her happiness was doomed to be short-lived ; and for that reason she was determined to enjoy it to the full as long as it lasted. To some women the very fact of its transient nature would have robbed her joy of all its charm ; but she was of the cheerful, light-hearted type which can shut off yesterday and to-morrow as easily as a P. & O. steamer can shut off its separate water-tight compartments.

So Jack and Ethel came to Silverhampton for a time, and there made love to their hearts' content. People could make love as well as they could make iron at Silverhampton in those days, and both were of the best quality and wore well. Happy hours were those at the Deanery, under the shadow of the Old Church. The blossoming season was over, and the time of fruit was come ; so the pear and apple orchards looked like a billowy sea of leaves, as one stood in King's Square and gazed across the green valley to the blue hills, beyond which was the home of the west wind.

Miss Camilla fell in love with Ethel at first sight ; for (though few people grasp this fact) old ladies are even more susceptible to youthful female beauty than young men are ; and this is by no means putting the case lightly. Every morning she left the lovers to themselves, while she attended matins in the Old Church and looked well to

the ways of her household ; and every afternoon she took them for a drive, for the drives are many and beautiful in that part of Mershire. They drove along Teteigh Wood, where one can see the whole panorama of three counties spread out before one, and where surely the sun takes more trouble to set becomingly than he takes anywhere else ; and thence down into the Holloway, and beside the canal, which looks more like a natural river devoted to pleasure than an artificial water-road for the carrying of coal. Another day they went by the old coach-road to Pembruge, the far-famed village of Nell and her grandfather in the *Old Curiosity Shop* ; where the ideal old church is like a miniature cathedral, and stands, with its ruined college, close by the edge of a lake bespangled with water-lilies. At the head of the lake is a fantastically devised castle, like the palace in some quaint old fairy-tale ; and all the woods around are a veritable queen's garden of wild flowers, and are in turn paved with marble and gold and amethyst, according as it is the season for snowdrops or daffodils or bluebells. It was too late for spring flowers when Jack and Ethel went to Pembruge ; but they wandered through the woods and worshipped in the church, and the stone crusaders there seemed to Jack to be repeating the same message that the warriors at Greystone had already brought—that message of the littleness of temporal and the greatness of eternal things.

Miss Camilla also took them to the quaint old house, some seven miles from Silverhampton, where Charles II. was once hidden in a hole in the cheese-room, and another time in an oak-tree. They saw the oak, which was by now far too old and decrepit to conceal a commoner, much less a king ; and they went down into the hole, one at a time, and wondered what it must feel like to be a fugitive monarch. And because royalty is like love, in that the places where it has once walked can never again be unhallowed ground—

which saying applies not only to the royalty of kingship, as any one will know who has trodden the streets of Stratford-upon-Avon, or sat in the arbour of Bishop Ken at Wells, or stood by Bunyan's cottage at Elstow—Ethel felt the same sort of a thrill there that she felt at Sunnydale when she passed by the spot where Jack first told her of his love.

They drove to Otter Dingle, which is as beautiful as the Trossachs, though on a smaller scale ; they went to Orewood, where King John once held his court ; they saw the old cross which marks the spot where a wild panther was slain by a knight—though the knight was at one end of a mile-long avenue and the panther at another—because the arrow was winged with a prayer ; they visited Kynaston Edge and saw the caves where strange robber-folk dwelt in bygone days ; and they learned that the country which is called black is some of the prettiest country in England, just as the people who are called common are often among the saints of the earth.

“Isn't it all lovely?” said Ethel one day, as she and Jack were wandering in the lanes that lie to the west of Silverhampton.

“Yes ; it is pretty enough. I was surprised to find it like this the first time I came here. When I said I had an aunt living at Silverhampton, people appeared to think that she dwelt at the bottom of a coal-pit.”

“I know : like Truth at the bottom of a well.”

“Exactly.”

“But don't you think, Jack, that people and places are invariably the opposite to what they are painted? I have never felt the cold in my life as I have felt it on the south coast ; I never knew what real depression meant till I met a funny man ; and now I think I have never seen anything so pretty as the Black Country.”

Jack laughed. “You should see the Black Country in

the spring. Now it is only green, but then it is pink and white like a gigantic birthday-cake. I never saw such blossom in my life as I saw here when I came to visit my aunt in the early part of the year. Next spring you and I will come and see it together, sweetheart."

The girl gave a little shudder. By next spring Jack would know the truth about her, and what would she care for green leaves and pink blossoms if she and Jack were separated for ever? Jack did not, however, notice the little shudder; he was a man of slow perceptions, and derived much comfort from the same. Quick perceptions are a doubtful blessing to their possessor, and an undeniable nuisance to their possessor's friends—unless, of course, in the exceptional cases when the friends happen to be absolutely sincere.

"But I think what really makes this place so pretty is your being here," Ethel said.

"You darling! Is it so nice being with me?"

"*Nice*, Jack? Why, it's perfectly heavenly. It makes every day seem like a birthday or a Jubilee or Christmas Day; and it turns every ordinary meal into a feast fit for a queen; and it changes common duties into delightful treats. You are like the king who turned to gold everything that he touched, for nothing seems dull or commonplace when I am with you."

"Sweetheart, you mustn't flatter me too much. If my memory doesn't deceive me, the king you refer to had asses' ears; and I am afraid you will think I carry out the resemblance if I believe all the pretty fibs you tell me about myself."

"They aren't fibs, Jack—really, they aren't. All the nice things I have ever imagined or dreamed of since I was born seem to have come true in you. Just as all roads lead to Rome, so all the pathways of my life seem to lead up to you. I have been waiting for you always,

## A Double Thread

dear. I knew I was waiting, but till you came I didn't know it was for you."

Jack's face glowed with delight and devotion, but he found it harder to talk about feelings than Ethel did.

"I think that life must be awfully dull to all the people who are not engaged," he remarked sapiently, after a moment's pause.

"I go farther than that. I think that life must be awfully dull to all the people who are not engaged to you."

"What a dear little girl you are! I wonder what makes you like me so much?"

"Oh! because you are you. It is a most adequate reason."

"I'm afraid I don't find it is what clever people call convincing."

Ethel's face grew serious. "Oh, Jack! you have no idea what you are to me."

"When did you begin to love me so much?" Jack wondered. "As soon as we met?"

"No, not exactly then. I will tell you how it was. All my life I had been conscious that I had another self asleep inside me—a self that neither I nor anybody else had ever seen. I knew that there was only one tune that could wake that sleeping self, and I knew that only one man would ever play that tune. As soon as I saw you I knew that you could play it, but I didn't know if you ever would, and I rather hoped that you would not."

"And did I?"

"Yes, and as soon as you played it the sleeping self woke up, and now she can never again be put to silence, either by you or by any one else."

"Are you happier than you were when she was still asleep?" Jack asked.

"Both happier and unhappier. Since I began to care

for you, I have reached heights and touched depths that I never dreamed of before ; and though I admit the heights are heavenly, the depths are quite the reverse. Capacity for joy means capacity for suffering too, and one cannot go in for one without the other. To fall in love is to plunge a dagger into one's own heart, and then to place the hilt of it in the hand of a man so that he may turn it at his pleasure. Sometimes I want to be young again, and to think that life is all beer and skittles ; and sometimes I am thankful I am old enough to know that there is really nothing in the world but you."

"My darling, I'm not clever like you are, and I can't say things nicely as you do. But, like the sailor's parrot, I'm 'a beggar to think,' and I care for you a million times more than I can ever say. I never minded being stupid before, but now I would give anything to be clever enough to tell you properly how much I love you. But though clever men might make love better, they couldn't feel it more than I do, you may be certain."

"Dear old boy, you aren't a bit stupid. You are the nicest, biggest, handsomest man in the whole world, and I'm most awfully proud of you. I'm so glad you are a soldier : I love soldiers."

Jack nodded. "Yes ; soldiering is a good business."

"Still, I think it is because you are a soldier that I like soldiers so much," Ethel added truthfully. "I should have adored your calling, whatever it might have been ; and if you had been a crossing-sweeper I should have come to the conclusion that crossing-sweeping was the only learned profession. Men love a woman because she happens to possess the qualities that they admire ; women admire certain qualities because the men they love happen to possess them."

"Oh ! that's it, is it ? I see."

"Isn't it lovely to be together again ?" remarked Ethel, as



the lovers seated themselves on a stile almost hidden in a thick wall of greenery. "Lanes are the proper places for making love, just as moors are the proper places for shooting grouse, and coal-fields are the proper places for manufacturing iron. Think of the poor people in London who have to make love in omnibuses and A B C shops and horrid places of that kind!"

"I don't think it matters where you make love as long as you've got the right person to make it to. Provided that you were there too, I could make love beautifully in an underground railway or a cocoa-house, let alone an omnibus or an A B C shop."

"What a nice boy you are!"

And then, as no one was looking, Jack kissed her.

In spite of the sword that was hanging over her head, that visit to Silverhampton was the happiest time of Ethel's life so far. In the first place, she was with Jack; and in the second, she found great delight in the companionship of Miss Camilla. There was extreme refinement, as well as considerable culture, in the Deanery at Silverhampton, and there was an utter absence of anything pertaining to snobbishness.

It would have been difficult to find anywhere a more perfect gentlewoman than Camilla Desmond. Although she did not belong to a great house in the aristocratic sense of the word, the Desmonds had long been the royal family, so to speak, of Silverhampton; and prestige of any kind always confers inward, as well as outward, grace on its possessor.

Lord Melbourne's celebrated remark respecting the absence of any merit in the disposition of the Garter, applies to other things than Orders of Knighthood. The greatness which men achieve, brings with it a certain amount of responsibility; but the greatness to which they are born—like that which is thrust upon them—is independent of any deserving on their part, and so carries with it an

unself-consciousness and easy confidence which nothing can displace.

It is the things in ourselves that we cannot help, about which we are proud and sensitive ; what we can alter at will is no subject for vanity or shame. This is the reason why a man can forgive us for doubting his motives or condemning his policy, but never for despising his ancestry or objecting to his personal appearance.

"Jack dear," said Ethel one day, "you have given me so many presents, and I have never yet given you one. But here is a ring that I want you to promise to wear always for my sake. Will you?"

"Of course I will, darling, if you wish it."

"You promise that you will wear it always, whatever happens?"

"Yes, sweetheart, till death."

Then Ethel took a ring out of a case and put it upon Jack's little finger. It was a massive gold ring, with a single stone in it ; and Jack was speechless with amazement when he saw that the stone was a wonderful pink diamond.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *SUSPICION.*

"I hewed an idol out of stone,  
The whitest stone I ever saw ;  
But by your proving it was shown  
The marble had a hidden flaw."

**M**R. FENTON, Miss Harland's lawyer, was in great distress ; for Miss Harland had left town in the middle of July, saying that she was going for a thorough rest to some outlandish German place whereof no sane person could pronounce the name, and leaving no address, as she did not want to be bothered with letters ; and at the end of August he had discovered that the Harland diamond was missing from the bank where it was always kept. It turned out that early in the month a young lady, whom the bank clerk took to be Miss Harland, came for the pink diamond and carried it away with her, leaving behind a receipt duly signed "Elfrida Harland" in Miss Harland's writing—or at any rate a very good imitation of it ; but on inquiry it was found out that this young lady's visit did not occur until nearly a month after Miss Harland had left London ; and thereupon the bank began to have a suspicion of foul play.

Mr. Fenton was very much upset by this untoward event, as Elfrida had left him in sole charge of all her affairs during her absence ; and he felt therefore in some degree responsible for the disappearance of the famous Harland

diamond. He was extremely angry with all the people at the bank, and all the people at the bank were extremely angry with each other ; but this merely relieved everybody's feelings and did nothing towards recovering the lost jewel. The bank clerk, who had given up the diamond, felt not the slightest doubt at the time that he was delivering it into the hands of its lawful owner ; and it was only when it accidentally transpired that this happened some weeks after Elfrida's departure from town, that any anxiety on the subject was aroused.

Then Mr. Fenton was communicated with, and he put the matter into the hands of a private detective, who succeeded in tracing the stone to a West End jeweller's. This latter had re-set it in the form of a ring for a young lady who gave her name as Miss Harland and who answered equally to the personal descriptions of Ethel and Elfrida ; and had sent it to her address at Sunnydale. The detective therefore arrived at the obvious conclusion that Ethel had impersonated her sister in order to obtain the jewel which was said to bring such luck to its possessor ; and he was confirmed in this impression after he had been down to Sunnydale and had learned the evil rumours rife there regarding Ethel and her mysterious manner of living.

Mr. Fenton was in a state of great perplexity. On the one hand he felt bound to punish such a cool and barefaced theft ; and on the other he did not feel at liberty to arrest Miss Harland's sister on a charge of robbery, without Miss Harland's permission. He inwardly made some highly unflattering comments upon Elfrida's unbusiness-like ways in going abroad and leaving no address behind her. "She might have had the sense to know that something of this kind was sure to happen," he said to himself ; as if a charge of theft against one's nearest relations was an event of everyday occurrence in fashionable circles.

But here Mr. Fenton was not peculiar. Which of us does

not feel, when a friend does a stupid thing, as if that particular friend had been doing that particular stupid thing as far back as we can remember? Irritation is wonderfully retrospective.

However, as Elfrida was out of his reach, and likely to remain so for some time, Mr. Fenton decided that his best course was to see Miss Ethel Harland and her relations, and to try to settle the matter if possible privately, and avoid the family disgrace of a public trial. So he ran down to Sunnydale.

As in the case of the detective, he felt himself seriously prejudiced against Ethel by all the reports he heard about her in the village. Of course it does not do to condemn any one, least of all a woman, unheard; but if the girl's manner of living was an honest one, why should she make such a mystery about it? Mr. Fenton argued. As she was five-and-twenty, she was old enough to know that reserve about one's private affairs is the height of ill-breeding. If people are anybody particular, their private affairs are either details of *Debrett*, or else matters of history as set forth in the daily papers; if they are not anybody particular, of course they pretend that they are, and so ape the unreserve of their betters; and if English people are not anybody particular, and do not pretend to be anybody particular, it is safe to conclude that there is something very wrong with them indeed.

Mr. Fenton had not studied law for fifty years without learning something.

The old solicitor went to see Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, and told them as gently as he could (which was very gently indeed, for Mr. Fenton was a gentleman of the old school) about the disappearance of the Harland diamond, and how it had been traced to their granddaughter's possession.

Poor old Mr. and Mrs. Morgan were very civil and

obliging to him, and far less indignant than he had expected; but he was conscious all the time that they were keeping something back, and that they knew far more than they would tell. But they assured him that they knew nothing about the loss of the famous pink diamond, though, like the rest of the world, they had heard of its existence; and so far he could see they were speaking the absolute truth. They made no demur about giving him Ethel's address at Silverhampton; and to Silverhampton therefore the lawyer repaired.

Ethel was forewarned of his coming by a letter from her grandmother; and she, in her turn, forewarned Jack. The latter roared and raged like a ramping lion, which was but natural, and threatened to reduce Mr. Fenton to powder if he put as much as his nose into Silverhampton. But at last, after much feminine argument of a soothing character, Jack promised that he would interview the solicitor in Ethel's stead, as she vowed that nothing would induce her to be brought into contact with him.

This Jack did; and though he refrained from fulfilling his original intention of pulverizing the old gentleman, he succeeded in making the short conversation between them the most uncomfortable quarter of an hour of Mr. Fenton's existence.

If the latter had been surprised at the calmness with which Mr. and Mrs. Morgan received his communication respecting the disappearance of the Harland diamond, he had nothing to complain of on this score in the case of Captain Le Mesurier.

And this though a pink diamond was at that very moment blazing upon Jack's little finger!

Mr. Fenton soon perceived that it was absurd to attempt to make any compromise with this righteously indignant young man, and therefore decided that the matter must be left to take its own course until Elfrida's return. After

that, Miss Harland herself must decide what was to be done.

So Mr. Fenton left Silverhampton with ruffled feelings but convinced judgment; for he was sure he had seen the famous Harland jewel on the finger of Captain Le Mesurier. He nourished a hope that between now and Elfrida's return Ethel might make her escape, and so avoid the disgrace of a public prosecution. For surely the loss of the family diamond was a lesser evil than the loss of the family reputation.

Jack Le Mesurier was terribly cut up by the lawyer's visit, besides being violently angry; yet he loyally forbore to ask Ethel any questions on the subject, and he bravely continued to wear in the face of the world the ring that she had given him. There was no doubt that Jack was a thorough gentleman. A less well-bred man would have left off wearing the ring even if he had refrained from asking questions.

"Dear," said Ethel to him, "how good you are! But can you trust me a little longer?"

"Till death, sweetheart."

"And you don't wonder how that stone comes to be in my possession?"

Jack hesitated a moment. "I will not allow myself to wonder about anything concerning you, dear. If you don't choose that I shall know a thing, I do not wish to know it."

"Just as a judge pretends not to know anything that has not come out in evidence."

Jack winced in spite of himself at this reference to a judge. He wished Ethel would not even in jest talk about such horrid things as judges.

"Ethel," he said seriously, "I have a favour to ask of you."

"Well, what is it? It shall be granted to the half of my

kingdom, if the moiety of a woman's kingdom is worthy of a man's acceptance."

But Jack could not smile. "I want you to marry me at once," he continued, "here and now; and so give me the right to fight all your battles for you in the future, and to stand between you and the world."

Ethel caught her breath. There are many varieties of the article called love abroad in the world; but surely the kind which induced a man to offer to marry a penniless woman who was accused of dishonesty, in order to stand between her and the world and take her shame upon himself, was the genuine article and no electro-plate.

"You see, dear," Jack went on, "I know things are very horrid for you just now; and, much as I love you, I cannot keep them from hurting you. But if you were my wife it would be different, and I would let no one vex or annoy you then."

"Then you do not think that I stole the Harland diamond?"

"Sweetheart, I know that you did not; but I want to have the right to knock down every man who is such a cad as to suggest that you did."

Then a great temptation seized Ethel. If once she were Jack's wife, she thought, nothing could separate them—not even the discovery of her secret; and so the fear of losing Jack, which haunted her night and day, would no longer assail her. All her life she had hungered for love, and it had been denied her; and now that at last it had come her way, would she not be a fool to let it go? Surely no man would ever love her as much again, and with such an unselfish, disinterested passion; and surely she could never love another man as she loved Jack Le Mesurier!

But because of her love for him she felt she could not marry him without telling him the truth; and because of his trust in her she felt she could not marry him under false



pretences. It is only when we trust people a little that they are able to deceive us ; a man must be very bad before he deceives any one who implicitly believes in him ; and a woman, however bad she may be, is incapable of doing it at all.

" Jack," she said, " it is just like you to want me to marry you now, and I can give you no higher praise. But I will never do so until the mystery of the pink diamond is cleared up."

" And will you then ? "

" If you will have me. And oh ! my dear, my dear, it will kill me if you won't."

" No fear," laughed Jack as he took her in his arms.

But he did not know then what the mystery was.

In spite of all Jack's entreaties Ethel was obdurate, and persisted in her refusal to marry him until the truth should have been made clear. And Jack was obliged to abide by her decision, though he chafed sorely thereat sometimes.

While he was still staying at Silverhampton, Sir Roger sent for him, saying he particularly wished to see him upon a matter of business ; so Jack left Ethel in Miss Camilla's charge, and repaired to Greystone for a day or two.

Afterwards he bitterly reproached himself for having let Ethel out of his sight. But how wise we all are after the event, and how busy we are with the locksmith after the steed has been abstracted from the stable !

Jack arrived at Greystone just in time for dinner, which Mr. Cartwright shared with him and his uncle ; and he greatly enjoyed listening to the talk of these two clever men of the world, though it was sometimes a little too quick for him, and gave him an uncomfortable feeling of running after them on tiptoe, like a child whose two hands are held by grown-up people.

When the servants had left the room, Sir Roger said pleasantly : " I have sent for you, my dear Jack, because,

contrary to my custom, I wish to put my finger in pies not of my own making ; and your pie is the one I have selected to begin upon, just to see if I enjoy the exercise. I am led to believe that this occupation is one of the few resources of the aged ; so I wish to try my hand—or rather my finger—at it, while, like Portia, I am not as yet ‘ too old to learn.’ You possess all the estimable qualities of the man who is a failure ; and I wish to speak a word of warning to you before you allow these estimable qualities full scope.”

“ I suppose, however, it is always a man’s own fault if he is a failure,” said Jack.

His uncle shook his head. “ No, not always ; but it is invariably a man’s own fault if he lets other people know that he is a failure ; and a fault, moreover, which reacts severely upon himself. For then they cease to envy him ; and an existence uncheered by the envy of one’s fellow-creatures is indeed desolate.”

Jack experienced the old feeling of helpless depression which his uncle’s cynicism always aroused ; but the rector only laughed.

“ Cartwright does not approve of envy,” added Sir Roger ; “ he considers it is his duty to reprove rather than his delight to arouse it.”

“ I was not treating the matter professionally just then,” replied Philip, “ but merely regarding it from a personal point of view. After all, to be envied merely means to be superior, and I do not wish to be a superior person.”

“ Does envy necessarily denote inferiority to the persons envied ? ” wondered Sir Roger.

“ I think so ; I never heard of any one’s envying an inferior. Therefore to become an object of envy is merely a form of playing to the gallery, like grumbling at the responsibilities of wealth, or railing against the horrors of vaccination.”

Sir Roger smiled, but his smile was a little wintry. He hated the people who were as clever as he was, but he despised the people who were not. Therefore he enjoyed Mr. Cartwright's society; since the objects of our hatred are always much more interesting than the butts of our contempt.

"It is an instructive comment upon human nature, my dear Cartwright, that to play to the gallery is usually to show the worst side of oneself."

"Not at all; as a matter of fact playing to the gallery is assuming a virtue for the occasion which we do not really possess; and is, in short, a form of cant. It is not only showing the best side of ourselves, but pretending that our best side is a great deal better than it is. When we play to the gallery, the gallery is all right; it is only the players that are a little cheap. If you, for instance, stood up in a costermonger's cart and sang hymns, it would be neither the cart nor the hymns that would be ridiculous. Yet your friends would smile."

"But I presume it is part of your artistic sense of the fitness of things that a clergyman should always appeal to the best side of human nature," said Sir Roger suavely; "would it be beside the mark to ask if you are often disappointed?"

"No. I believe that the man who persistently appeals to the best side of his fellows is rarely disappointed; and that the man who persistently appeals to their worst side is disappointed even more rarely," replied the rector drily.

"Human nature is a contemptible thing, but I have a certain liking for it. For one thing I understand it, and it amuses me."

"But I should doubt if you do understand it since you dub it contemptible," argued Mr. Cartwright.

"My dear ecclesiastic, you shock me! Has it not been the object of all religious men—whether they have been

cloistered monks or preaching puritans—to stamp out human nature in themselves, and still more in their friends?

“I think not. Human nature may not be the best possible nature, but it is our nature; and our business is to cultivate, not to crush, it. Let us be the best human creatures we can be, but let us still be human! For to try to make ourselves into anything different, is as absurd and artificial as clipping yew-trees into the shape of peacocks, or colouring carnations to the tint of Brussels sprouts.”

“My dear Jack,” said Sir Roger, turning to his nephew, “the conversation, owing to the brilliance of our friend here, drifts away from you; but the mention of such vain and vernal things as peacocks and Brussels sprouts recalls your existence again to my mind. As I remarked before, you appear to be studying the part of a failure; and by a failure I mean a man who sacrifices real property to ideal properties, and who holds all the honours and loses all the tricks.”

“Well, sir, do you think that is my *role* at present?”

“I fear so. I greatly fear so. If you are a man of this type you will have an interesting career. In your profession you will earn respect without remuneration; and should you turn to politics in after life, you will lose elections and win moral victories. In conclusion, your biography will be written by some friend whose zeal outruns his literary ability, and will be sent round to your successful political acquaintances; who, in turn, will present their copies—uncut—to the free libraries of their respective constituencies.”

“The nicest men I have known have been failures,” interrupted Mr. Cartwright; “in fact, I am one myself. I have never succeeded in getting what I wanted.”

“My dear Cartwright, you are confusing terms. Success is not getting the thing that we want, but the thing that other people want. You possess all the attributes that I

have vainly longed for; therefore I dislike and admire you equally, and consider you an ideally successful man."

"If I have got the things that you want, I must say that your wishes take a strange direction."

"Possibly; but that has no bearing upon the case. The only things worth having in this world are a handsome person and social charm. You have both, and so my envy becomes the coping-stone of your triumph."

"I do not know that social success is a proper attribute for a parson," laughed the rector.

Sir Roger shrugged his shoulders. "Believe me, it is the most influential quality that he can have. A preacher who rails at the hollowness of a world that declines to visit with him, is not unlike the fox who lost his tail in a trap and begged all his fellows to have theirs amputated likewise. But a prophet who sees the world at his feet and yet despises it, speaks with something of the authority of the Wise Man's bitter 'Vanitas vanitatum,' and of the Apostle's scornful 'Are they Hebrews? So am I.' No one can afford to depise anything that he does not possess."

"I think I see what you mean. If one who has reigned in Babylon turns his face towards Jerusalem, Jerusalem at once rises—in the estimation of the congregation of Mammon-worshippers—to the level of Liverpool or Manchester, or even London. Yes; it is strange, but it is true."

"Jack," said Sir Roger, "here is a successful man. Emulate him as far as lies in your power, and always bear in mind that he remained a bachelor. Marriage increases a woman's social success, but impairs a man's; the latter attains the zenith of his popularity before the third volume of his life's story is published, and while the leading lady is as yet an unknown quantity. My theory is that all women should marry, and no men; it is an admirable idea, and

the only objection to it lies in the difficulty of working it out."

Jack laughed a false laugh, and felt himself shrivelling up as leaves shrivel in a frost.

"I do not applaud your theory, Sir Roger," said the rector. "I think that marriage is even better for a man than for a woman. A single man must, to a great extent, live for himself alone; whilst, be a woman never so unmarried, there are always whole rows of family altars (belonging to brothers, and sisters, and nieces, and the like) inviting and expecting the immolation of herself. The only difference between the married and the single woman is that to the former self-sacrifice is a luxury, and to the latter a necessity; they indulge in it equally."

"Then don't you agree with my uncle that marriage makes a man less popular?" asked Jack.

"It makes him more popular with himself, and decidedly more popular with the woman he marries, and considerably less popular with all the other women. But the man who really cares much about the opinion of all the other women must be—well, twenty-nine at the most."

"But you think married people happier than single ones, don't you?" persisted Jack.

"Probably happier, and certainly wiser. They have drunk the whole cup of life, you see, and know what it tastes like; while the others are like people who say 'no sugar,' or 'no cream, thank you,' and so are in ignorance of the real flavour of a proper old-fashioned cup of tea."

Jack nodded. "I see."

"Besides," continued Philip Cartwright, "it is always better, if possible, to get the full flavour out of anything—even in cases when the flavour may be somewhat bitter. Personally, I feel more pity for the people who have waited on the bank and caught cold in their hearts and souls

through standing still too long, than with those who have been bruised and buffeted by the full force of the stream. At any rate, the latter have lived, and the former have only existed."

"Still, bruises hurt more than colds," suggested Jack.

"But do not kill so often. Again, have you ever noticed that there is no spectacle so depressing as the ruins of a house that has never been finished? The ruins of houses that have had their day and been lived in, are often restful and beautiful and picturesque; but the decay of a building that has been begun and not completed, is one of the most ghastly and hideous objects on the face of the earth. So many lives seem to me like that; and with such lives I have the profoundest sympathy."

"Cartwright," Sir Roger interrupted, "pray be more personal and less general in the tenor of your always interesting remarks, and warn this foolish nephew of mine against the danger of losing his head; a danger which, I fear, besets him sadly at present."

"No, Sir Roger; I am afraid I cannot do that. I have no respect or regard for a man who never loses his head. It is the men who lose their heads that do great things. The principle that 'he that loseth his life shall save it,' has a wide application. It is only by losing our hearts that we win love, by losing our heads that we win fame, and by losing ourselves that we win others."

Sir Roger smiled slightly. "You are very clever, and can make most things mean what you want them to mean, which is wisdom. But can you approve of a young man's taking to wife a woman who is not only penniless and obscure, but who is suspected of helping herself to the things which belong to some one else?"

Jack started as if he had been stung. How had this horrible thing come to his uncle's ears, he wondered? He

had no idea of the penetrating and pervading influence of ordinary thoughtless gossip.

Sir Roger continued: "Can you approve of a man, whose means are as limited as his intellectual powers, uniting himself to a woman of whom unpleasant things are said; and things so unpleasant that nothing could refute them save the wealth whereof no one dare think evil, or the wit whereof no one dare say it?"

"If a young man dared to say as much as that, I'd knock him down," Jack said angrily.

"Naturally, my dear nephew; and a very proper course to pursue. But young men don't say such things to one another, you know. They prefer to let their friends make fools of themselves in peace, as the mistakes and misfortunes of a contemporary are never wholly flavourless. It is only when we see the next generation committing folly, that we long to interfere; which proves that old age enlarges our hearts and contracts our intellects at the same time."

"I think, sir, I would rather not discuss this subject," Jack said stiffly.

"I feel sure that you would not; but, as a matter of fact, I am not considering your pleasure at all. Had I been, I should not even have mentioned the question, much less proposed to discuss it. But now I will be candid with you—though candour is not my usual *role*—and tell you that, as a man of the world, I consider you are making a fatal mistake in marrying Ethel Harland. I never had a conscience; but the *locum tenens* which plays the part of a conscience in my own mind, tells me that it is my duty, as an older and wiser and much worse man than yourself, to do all in my power to prevent you from committing this crowning act of folly."

"I have made up my mind, and there is no more to be said about it."

"Pardon me, there is plenty to be said; and, what is



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more, I am going to say it. As long as you only proposed to marry a girl without money, I didn't interfere. I told you I should not, under those circumstances, leave you Greystone—that was my business ; but I never endeavoured to dissuade you from enjoying yourself in your own way—that was yours. But now the case has assumed a different aspect. A woman without a penny may make a man happy—a woman without prestige never can ; and although Elfrida Harland, as is probable, will decline to prosecute her sister, the latter will always be looked down upon until the mystery of the pink diamond is cleared up. As far as my experience goes, prestige is the only lasting charm. Beauty fades, wit bores, and wealth is expended ; but social distinction certainly never loses its influence on this side the grave, and it requires a superhuman faith to realize that it will do so on the other. In fact, I never yet met anybody who did really believe it, though they all pretend that they do."

Jack held up his head proudly. "I will see to it that my wife is never looked down upon."

"My dear boy, that is mere bunkum—bunkum and bluff. If other women look down upon a woman, all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot make them look up again until they choose ; and they will never choose, if she happens to be handsomer than they are. But they will make life a hell upon earth to the woman, poor soul ! and to her husband too."

Philip Cartwright sighed. "I am afraid that is only too true. And yet good women can be such angels when they like."

"And the other thing, when they don't like. They appear to be equally at home in both parts, the dear clever creatures, and they alternate these parts as they choose, and no man can order their goings. I have met many women who have asked men's advice," Sir Roger continued meditatively, "but I do not think I ever came across one

who was guided by it. No; they go their own way, whatever anybody says."

"If a woman really loves a man, she will never do anything she knows he doesn't approve of," said Jack didactically.

His uncle smiled. "Pardon me; if a woman really loves a man, she will never let him know when she does anything that he doesn't approve of; which comes to the same thing—as far as the man is concerned. But let us descend from generalities to the matter in hand. You are going to be got out of this mess, and I am going to extract you—with or without chloroform, as you prefer."

"I decline, however, to be extracted, thank you all the same."

"Your permission was not asked, most agreeable of nephews."

"It will always be withheld," muttered Jack.

Sir Roger poured himself out a glass of claret, and sipped it thoughtfully; then he remarked: "It is a pity that yours is a summer engagement, Jack—a great pity!"

Jack looked puzzled through his sulkiness. "I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Summer engagements are so much more difficult to get out of than winter ones, because of the letters. In the winter, one has fires, so there is a refuge for both the love-letters that one receives and the love-letters that one doesn't send. Of course the love-letters that one does send still remain; but, if one is a wise man, these are but few in comparison. In the summer, all one's sentimental effusions are consigned to the conditional immortality of the waste-paper basket, and so may rise again at any moment and confront one. Yes, love-making, like hunting, is properly a winter sport; when carried on in the summer it is only for cubs."

"I cannot argue with you, sir, you are much too clever

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for me. But I know my own mind, and I know that I will never give up Ethel Harland."

Sir Roger raised his small white hands in despair. "Then your career is spoiled, and your chance of happiness also. A wife, like a joke, should require no explanation. A man once said to me that it was impossible to really respect a woman who invariably walked last out of the dining-room."

"Nobody but a fool would make such a remark as that," said Jack angrily.

"Possibly. It was a fool who made it. But as society is principally composed of fools, their opinion on any question is worth considering. If no fool will call upon you and your wife, you will have but a small visiting acquaintance, my dear Jack. Cartwright, cannot you say something to instil wisdom into this insane and socially-suicidal young man?"

The rector shook his head. "I am afraid he has already more wisdom than you and I put together. The wise man, like his brother the poet, is born, not made; and age brings us nothing better than experience, which is to wisdom what wooden legs are to real ones—better than nothing, perhaps, but a poor substitute."

But Sir Roger persisted. "Jack, my boy, give the girl up. She will ruin your prospects and she will never make you happy."

"My idea was to improve her prospects and to make her happy," replied Jack drily; "and I don't quite see what the other side of the question has to do with the matter."

"That's right!" agreed Philip. "As I told you, Sir Roger, the fellow is wiser than you and I are after all."

"He has not half our sense."

"Not a quarter of it; and that is why he has room for so much more wisdom."

Sir Roger smiled. "I should have called the two synonymous."

"Far from it. Wisdom comes direct from Heaven, while sense is picked up on the Stock Exchange or in London society."

"Thank you," said Jack simply. He felt better now that Philip Cartwright had entered the lists as his champion.

The rector continued. "Don't take away his Aladdin's lamp of heaven-sent wisdom and youthful enthusiasm, which raises fairy palaces and obviates distances both social and geographical; and then offer him in its place such trumpery little candles as you have managed to light at the fires of Vanity Fair, and which merely serve to show up the dirt and the cobwebs which disfigure all temples made with hands. Leave him to marry the woman he loves, and to fight her battles for her; and bid him fight the harder the more she needs it. That is my advice to you, Sir Roger."

"You wax eloquent," sneered his host.

"Do I? Never mind. Eloquence is a failing rather than a fault, and one grows out of it quickly enough in these modern days of the apotheosis of common sense. But you appealed to me and I respond to your appeal. That my response is not in accordance with your desires, I can help no more than Balaam could. A prophet cannot bless or curse, as he plays croquet or the piano, to amuse his parishioners and to oblige his patron."

"And do you venture to prophesy that my misguided nephew will find happiness with a woman who will ruin both his pecuniary and his social prospects?"

"I venture to prophesy that if your nephew, or any other man, sells his birthright for a mess of pottage, and deliberately takes the lower road because the higher one happens to be steep and stony, he will regret it bitterly in this world and still more bitterly in the next. Can you look me in the face and deny that—in spite of all your

cultured cynicism and worldly wisdom—you sometimes envy the simpler souls who still trust man and love woman and worship God? Can you give me your word, as a man of honour, that you have ever known a moment of real happiness since you forsook all your enthusiasms and let your ideals go? It seems to me, Sir Roger, that it is you who are now playing the part of the fox without a tail. Because you have missed the best in life, you advise your nephew to throw it away also, lest you should be annoyed by his superiority to you. This is unworthy of you as a man of the world, let alone any higher consideration."

"Then you would advise me to leave fools to enjoy their folly after their own fashion?"

"What you would call folly—yes."

Then, as Philip Cartwright and Jack both refused to discuss the matter further, Sir Roger was forced to let it drop, and turn to other things.

When the evening was over, Jack saw the rector home through the summer moonlight; and as they walked together the younger man said: "It is surprising to me that such a confirmed cynic as my uncle should be so kind to me and show such an interest in my affairs."

"People always possess more heart than they appear to have, except those few who appear to have more heart than they possess."

"I think that my uncle is attached to me in his way, and takes a real interest in me."

"I am sure that he does. If he cares for anybody in this world, he cares for you."

"I suppose there was a woman at the bottom of his cynicism," said Jack musingly; "there generally is."

"Invariably, I fancy."

"Did she jilt him, do you know?"

"No," replied the rector, "I believe not. But she was young and beautiful and light-hearted; and because he

happened to be plain and dwarfish, she regarded his devotion as a comedy rather than a tragedy. Women are often like this—even nice women. It is so difficult for them to believe that what appears ridiculous may really be pathetic, and that what appears impressive may really be bluff. In the same way, if you want a woman to believe that you love her you must tell her so at least once a week. There is no other possible way of making her grasp the fact. Dying for her would not help in the least.”

“I am afraid you haven’t a very high opinion of the sex.”

“On the contrary, I have the highest. But I have not a very high opinion of men who jump to the easy conclusion that women’s minds are cheap editions, in paper covers, of their own, and deal with them accordingly. I think a woman’s love is so well worth having that it is even worth the trouble of talking to her about it.”

“You are very wise,” said Jack respectfully; “I shouldn’t think you would make many mistakes in dealing with women, or with any other puzzling question.”

Philip smiled rather sadly. “Not now, perhaps; but I have done so. I do not refrain from making mistakes because I am wise; I am wise because I once made mistakes. It is only by daring to make mistakes that a man learns wisdom; and it is so expensive a branch of education that, like college debts, it generally impoverishes him for the rest of his life.”

Jack was silent for a moment, then he asked: “Did the woman that my uncle loved laugh at him?”

“Yes; but not with any intentional cruelty. She was purely feminine, and so could not separate appearances from realities. I do not think she would ever have loved him; but if he had been a taller man, she would probably have confided with tears to her dearest friend the story of his disappointment. She loved and married

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a remarkably handsome man; and Sir Roger has sneered at mankind in general and womankind in particular ever since. At least that is the story as I have heard it; but it all happened before my time."

"I wonder if she was a nice woman?"

"I am sure she was, Jack, for she was your mother."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *PERCY WELFORD.*

"That glimpse of the garden across the way  
Has left me henceforth for the road unfit:  
The traffic rolls onward from day to day,  
And sick is my soul at the sound of it."

**I**T is a noteworthy fact that when we make inquiries about anything or anybody, we generally impart more information than we receive. This was the case with Mr. Fenton when he visited Sunnysdale in order to obtain glimpses into the life and occupation of Ethel Harland.

Miss Barber's innocent remark at the evening party had laid the foundation of an evil report against the organist's granddaughter; Mr. Fenton's visit, added to the leading questions which he had felt bound to put to Mr. Welford and such like men of mark in the neighbourhood, soon raised up an imposing structure on this foundation; and the structure when raised became a very palace of delight to all those who called themselves Ethel's "friends."

"You know how I always hated Ethel Harland," Julia Welford remarked one day at a small tea-party, "even before I knew anything against her; and that shows what acute sensibilities I have."

As a matter of fact Julia did not know anything against Ethel even now—she only accepted with avidity other people's uncharitable suggestions; but with Miss Welford,



as with many people, knowledge merely meant the adoption of such beliefs as fell in with her preconceived opinions.

"The poor thing has no mother," said Mrs. Welford with a comfortable sigh. "I always pity girls with no mothers to look after them. As I said to Mrs. Bailey only a few days ago, 'Mrs. Bailey,' I said, 'the young people laugh at their parents, but they could not have done without us all the same.' And no more they could."

"All women are unjust to one another," Percy remarked; "they live in such a small world that they lose all sense of perspective, and therefore things which are actually small loom large before their unaccustomed eyes."

"I do not perceive how stealing can ever be merely a question of perspective," snapped Julia.

Julia Welford would always use the word "perceive" in preference to "see," and "commence" in preference to "begin." This was her idea of culture.

"Oh! my dear, you shouldn't make use of such a nasty expression as stealing," remonstrated her mother; "it isn't ladylike, and it isn't kind, and I very much doubt if it is even true, for I don't believe all the tales about Ethel Harland, indeed I don't."

"That is just like you, mamma! You would take any girl's part against your own daughter. It doesn't matter who she may be, but she is sure to know better than I do—in your opinion." And Julia lashed herself into a small fury over her unnatural mother's purely fictitious preference for Ethel Harland.

Julia was always deliberately hurting herself, and then expecting sympathy for the pain she quite unnecessarily suffered. And though the cause was purely imaginary, the suffering she endured was very real indeed.

Some women go through life knocking their heads against stone walls of their own building, and suffer avoidable agonies accordingly. These are, as a rule, the clever women.

Others take good care not to build any stone walls at all ; but when they find one erected by Providence right across their path, they plant ivy and roses to cover it, and then pretend that there is no stone wall there at all. These are the still cleverer ones.

Julia Welford belonged to the former class.

"Dear Mrs. Welford, you are quite right," chimed in little Miss Barber ; "that poor young girl has been deprived of the advantage of a mother's training, and has consequently gone astray. Ever since I heard this terrible rumour about her, I have longed to do something to help her, and to supply in a measure her poor mother's place."

Miss Barber spoke in all sincerity. She had not the shadow of an idea that it was she herself who had, in the first instance, started the notion of Ethel's dishonesty ; if she had known this it would have broken her heart. The evil that is "wrought by want of thought" is not the least evil existent in this world, though frequently undreamed of by the author.

"Dear Mrs. Bailey," Mrs. Cottle was whispering confidentially on the other side of the room, "I was sadly hurt the other day to hear the way in which Mrs. Brown spoke of your good husband ; and I feel it only my duty, though a very painful one, to repeat to you what she said."

Mrs. Cottle actually believed that the so-called duty was painful to her ; and this belief considerably increased her pleasure in the performance of it.

"Indeed !" replied the vicar's wife coldly, wondering that Mrs. Cottle was not old enough to have learnt that when A repeats B's nasty speeches to us, we do not hate B nearly as much as we hate A.

"It was his ritualistic tendencies that made her speak so unwarrantably," continued Mrs. Cottle ; "she considered that they quite obviated any good he might do by his really powerful discourses. Now here I disagree with her, and I

told her so. For I consider it is a Christian duty to forgive all those who differ from us, provided we are convinced that they are acting conscientiously according to their lights. And, besides, I think it was a great impertinence on the part of Mrs. Brown to presume to criticize the vicar in that way ; but Mrs. Brown always has given herself unconscionable airs on the strength of her late husband's having been a professional man. I assure you, positively, she looks down on Mrs. Welford and myself ; and I really have no patience with such snobbery ; have you ? ”

“ I am afraid I haven't much patience with snobbery of any kind.”

“ And I don't blame you, Mrs. Bailey. I feel exactly the same myself. It really is ridiculous for Mrs. Brown to persist in walking out of a room before me, when my husband could have bought hers up ten times over. Not that it affects me ; I am thankful to say I have a soul above such trifling considerations ; but it is very hurtful to one's pride to be put straight on a question of etiquette by a woman whose income is less than a tenth part of one's own.”

Mrs. Bailey smiled. “ I have never endured such an experience ; for a woman with an income of less than a tenth of mine would be studying ‘ the rules of the House, ’ most probably as a pauper.”

“ And, when all is said and done, Mrs. Brown's refinement is only superficial ; true refinement would not attach the importance to trifles that she attaches. Would you believe it ?—she actually took upon herself to reprove me the other day for not leaving the correct number of cards when I went out paying visits. As if it could signify to anybody how many cards I left ! Such rubbish ! ” And Mrs. Cottle fairly bristled with the righteous indignation which we all feel when convicted of negligence or ignorance in matters social.

"Perhaps she meant it kindly," suggested Mrs. Bailey.

"Not she! Did you ever know anybody who meant it kindly when they told a friend of a fault? I never did. When people mean kindly they don't mention their friends' failings at all; that is my doctrine, and I am sure I try to live up to it, Mrs. Bailey, and if I fail it is my misfortune rather than my fault. But still I do not admit that I was in fault about the cards. As I have told you, I consider that true refinement ought to be above such insignificant trifles, and therefore I do not stoop to trouble my mind about them; but I was quite correct as to the number of cards I left, for I had carefully studied the matter in the 'Answers to Correspondents' in *The Queen*."

"Then if you knew you were right, why take any notice of what anybody says?"

"Because, Mrs. Bailey, like all truly refined natures I am extremely sensitive, and I cannot bear that my conduct—even in the most trifling matters—should be called in question. We are all alike in our family: we shrivel up at an unkind word as a flower shrivels in the east wind. And it is specially hurtful to be blamed for things in which one knows one is above suspicion. If Mrs. Brown had said that I neglected my husband or spoiled my children, I could have borne it—I may perhaps be a little too fond of society to be a perfect housewife; but to suggest that I am ignorant of any matters pertaining to social etiquette is an indignity which I could not bear from an angel or a duchess, let alone from Mrs. Brown."

Mrs. Bailey's eyes twinkled. "I have always thought that people were sensitive on their weak points, rather than on their strong ones."

"Then you were mistaken, Mrs. Bailey, utterly mistaken. No one knows more about sensitiveness than I do, as I have always belonged to such an exceedingly sensitive family." Mrs. Cottle spoke as if people were in the habit of changing

their ancestry in middle-life : some people are, it is believed. "Now there was my aunt Matilda, whom I am said to resemble ; it was a source of great regret to her that her husband was in retail rather than wholesale trade ; and so exquisitely refined was her nature, that she never once, in all her married life, allowed her husband's business to be mentioned under her roof. Such true gentility as this is innate in some people, and cannot be acquired by those who are so unfortunate as to be without it."

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Bailey, and inwardly returned thanks for the same.

"I shall never forget a terrible scene once," continued Mrs. Cottle, "when my aunt Matilda's husband so far forgot himself as to make some reference to his business at his own dinner-table. As ill luck would have it, some of my aunt's nicest friends were dining with her on that day—or rather lunching, I should say—a lady and gentleman who were distantly related to a Lord Mayor and extremely intimate with a Rural Dean ; and you can imagine how painful so coarse a reference was to my aunt in such company as this."

"Was it ?"

"Oh ! most terribly so ; she had such a superfine nature and such genteel sensitiveness. I was not present at the time, but I believe she fainted at the table, and it was only after her own family intervened, and showed her it was her duty to forgive her husband even so gross an insult as this, that she consented to pardon him. And what made it so doubly painful for her was that her husband could not see wherein he had offended, and made some low remark to the effect that those who were not ashamed to spend the money shouldn't be ashamed to make it. He was very sorry that she was upset, but he refused to see what there was in his behaviour to upset her. Ah ! dear Mrs. Bailey, think what it must have been to a delicate organization like my aunt's

to be tied to a coarse-minded man who was not even ashamed of his own business ! And they all tell me that I am exactly like her."

While Mrs. Cottle thus instructed the vicar's wife in the racial peculiarities of her house, Mrs. Brown was asking of her hostess, "And how is Mr. Welford, I should like to know?"

"He is getting on comfortably, thank you, very comfortably indeed. The fact is he has given up religion for a bit and taken to politics, and they don't upset his temper or his digestion half so much, I am thankful to say." Mrs. Welford's words were ambiguous ; but the meditations of her heart were all right.

Mrs. Brown sniffed ominously. "Politics indeed ! Don't call Liberalism politics, Mrs. Welford, if you please ; call it anarchy or Popery or anything you like, but don't call it politics."

"I was brought up a Conservative myself," apologized Mrs. Welford, who though stout was timid ; "my father was a very strong one." She was a loyal wife, and she knew it was wrong to be ashamed of her husband's principles, let Mrs. Brown rage never so fiercely ; nevertheless she was.

"Then I wonder you are not afraid to look your father's spirit in the face," said Mrs. Brown.

Mrs. Welford would of course have been terrified to do any such thing, quite apart from political considerations, but she did not trouble to demonstrate this fact to her irate guest ; she merely replied meekly : "I suppose there must be two parties in the State, or else the country would never get on."

"Then let there be two parties, or twenty parties, or two hundred parties for all I care ; I don't mind how many parties there are as long as there isn't a Liberal party ; but that I can't and won't stand. I am not narrow or bigoted, as you know ; and I would allow all people to hold their

own opinions, provided they were correct ones. But when you come to Radical opinions it is a different thing."

"What is it that you so much object to in the principles of the Liberal party?" asked Mrs. Welford with a sudden spurt of courage.

"All of them; if I had my way I should allow nobody but Conservatives to have votes at all, and that would save no end of trouble at a general election."

"But why, dear Mrs. Brown, I should like to know? The fact is, I was only saying to my husband yesterday, 'James,' I said, 'when I hear you talk, I want to send a missionary to the Conservatives; and when I heard my father talk, I used to pray to be delivered from all Liberals; so what am I to believe?' Oh dear! Oh dear! it seems to me that there is nothing so unsettling as hearing first one side and then the other."

"You ought not to hear the Radical side; that is where I blame you."

"But I must listen when my husband talks to me," argued Mrs. Welford, with some show of reason.

Her judge, however, was as adamant. "I don't see that; I never did."

"I cannot help saying that it seems to me there is a good deal to be said for the views of the Liberals on a great many subjects," argued Mrs. Welford with some spirit; "at least that is how they appear when one's husband explains them to one. I am sure if you went into the question you would see that they have several legs to stand upon, and that there is something to be said on their side after all."

"Nothing would induce me to go into the question—nothing! When I disapprove of a thing I don't dabble in it; and I should never go against my conscience to the extent of hearing the merits of a case which I knew to be wrong. I am thankful to say that I always can see at once, in any argument, which is the right view and which is the

wrong one; and from that moment I turn my back on the wrong one, and never have anything more to do with it. It is this that has made me what I am." Which was quite true.

"Still I cannot help wishing that you could hear James explain his views," persisted Mrs. Welford.

"Nothing would induce me to listen to him," cried Mrs. Brown; "do you think that I should still be the staunch Conservative that I am if I had wasted my time and undermined my judgment by reading Liberal newspapers and listening to Liberal speeches? And do you suppose I should be the contented Christian that I am, satisfied with my character as Providence has made it, and not trying to improve either myself or the Church, if I had exposed myself to the influence of ritualistic services or revivalistic sermons? No, Mrs. Welford; I have kept clear of all this modern craze for reform and improvement and goodness knows what; and in return, I am thankful to say, it has kept clear of me." A statement so undeniable that Mrs. Welford did not attempt to refute it.

On her way home from the Welfords' tea-party, Mrs. Bailey fell in with her husband, who had been visiting some of his sick poor; and her heart was so hot within her against all she had heard, that she retailed it to him, relying upon his unflinching powers to see things as others saw them, and then to put them in a more favourable light.

"Isn't it sickening?" she said when she had finished her recital. "It makes me perfectly heartsore to listen to those women's mean, petty talk about all sorts of absurd trifles. And they say such spiteful things, too."

A smile stole over the vicar's thin, ascetic face; his wife's impulsiveness always afforded him some tender amusement. "My dear, they are to be pitied rather than blamed, believe me. It is not their fault altogether that they



interest themselves in gossip and tittle-tattle; it is also the fault of the narrow places in which their lines have fallen."

"Then they ought to widen their views of life."

"Of course they ought, Margaret; but it is not exactly easy to widen one's horizon line. Nevertheless I own it ought to be done; and the only way of doing so, in matters spiritual as well as material, is to rise higher and higher."

"Yes; that is true. It is difficult to live in a small world and not grow small oneself to match it."

"Very difficult; and it is almost impossible for a woman, who is born to a commonplace lot with a commonplace intellect, to make her world a larger one. But she can always rise higher; and then she will find that the nearer she gets to heaven the wider views she will take of earth."

"Oh! Charles, I wish I were as wise and as patient as you are."

"I am only patient because I feel so sorry for the poor things. I know it is their fault in a way, but it is not entirely their fault; they want more interests in their lives—even the married ones. Their minds and souls are starved for lack of proper nourishment; and as starving bodies eat garbage rather than nothing, starving souls will do the same. Women who are above the class that systematically work, and below the class that systematically play, have a dull time of it; and we cannot condemn them overmuch if they try to make for themselves interests out of the scanty materials at their command. They have more restraint and less excitement than the classes above and below them, and are consequently much more free from great faults and much more prone to small failings. I should say, speaking roughly, that the women of the English middle-classes lead the best and the dullest lives of any women on the face of the earth."

"I am inclined to agree with you."

"Of course there are many, many exceptions," Mr. Bailey continued; "but what I mean is that dulness is the special pitfall of that type of female society, including all the ills that dulness breeds; and that, therefore, these women should be on the look-out to provide themselves with more interests than Fate has thrust upon them. Dulness does not only make one feel dull; it deadens one's faculties and one's capabilities as well, and makes one a poorer creature altogether."

"Then you think that women of the Welford and Cottle and Barber type want more amusement?"

"Not only more amusement, though they certainly want that; but more enthusiasm, more idealism, more mental stimulus. The inward vision of all of us is formed to look into heavenly things; so that when we adapt it to the minute examination of that which is of the earth earthy, it is all out of focus, and perceives only distorted images. Those men and women who see no visions and have no perception of that which is invisible, but keep their eyes steadfastly fixed on things too small to be considered at all, magnify trifles till their spiritual microscope transforms a midge into a monster, and a drop of rain-water into a regular witch's caldron."

"I do not believe that Woman could ever rise to Man's intellectual level," remarked Mrs. Bailey, after a short pause.

"Possibly not; but she can help him to rise to heights, both intellectual and spiritual, which he could never attain without her. Woman was not meant to be a goddess or a plaything or a drudge; she was meant to be a companion to Man. Therefore the so-called strong-minded women, who wear themselves out with abusing and defying men, and the so-called domestic women, who cut themselves down solely to the ordering of dinners and the counting of clothes for the wash, are alike failures."

"Yes, that is quite true. How well you put things!" And then the vicar and his wife arrived at their own garden gate, and had to exchange abstract and theoretic conversation for concrete and domestic duty.

Mrs. Bailey was in the habit of taking out her husband's views at intervals, and airing them, as she did his linen. Happy is the man who has some good woman to do this for him; for views—like clothes—grow mouldy and moth-eaten if they are kept shut up and are never brought out into the light and air.

A day or two after his mother's tea-party Percy Welford ran down to Silverhampton to see Ethel Harland, who was staying at the Deanery during Jack's absence. Percy did not tell his mother where he was going, nor why; for he had learnt, like wiser folk, that when one intends to perform an action not altogether in accordance with the prejudices of the powers that be, it is as well not to mention the matter in the hearing of those powers until after the event.

Ethel was surprised, and by no means delighted, to see him; but she endeavoured, with her usual good manners, to conceal alike her amazement and her absence of joy.

Percy expressed himself as charmed with the town in general, and the Deanery in particular.

"It is a most fascinating spot," he said, "and so beautifully situated. Its position, on the crest of the hill, positively reminds me of Jerusalem or of Rome."

Percy spoke with authority, as he had studied pictures of these cities in various Sunday books ever since he was a child.

"And that is a most elegant vista which one catches sight of," he continued, "as one looks westward from the central square."

"Yes; it is a pretty view," remarked Ethel indifferently.

"But the opposite prospect is indeed a depressing one.

How sad to see a country intended by Nature to be beautiful, trampled into coal-dust by the iron heel of Commerce!" sighed Percy, who would have lived and died a pauper if the iron heel of Commerce had not walked his way.

"But I thought you were interested in Commerce, Mr. Welford?"

"I?—with my artist soul! Oh! no, you never could have thought that. To me, buying and selling must always be more or less vulgar," Percy replied, never having learnt that what is is never vulgar, only what pretends to be.

"I see."

"This room too is very effective," continued Percy graciously; "there is something in the furnishing of it which acts as a sedative to my jaded spirit. As I look round me I feel that I sympathize with the intention and aim in harmony with the design."

Ethel could not help smiling at the idea of Percy's being in harmony with anything pertaining to Miss Camilla.

"It is furnished in very good taste," she said.

"It is indeed, with admirable taste. Look at this small table, for instance; what an elegant conception! Such artistic finish on the surface and such delicate Corinthian feeling about the legs!"

"Miss Desmond has some very fine Chippendale."

"Then look at the paper," cried Percy, flitting about the room in a very ecstasy of appreciation; "what a delicious fugue in colour!—what a perfect sonata in tints! Deliver me from wall-papers which are crude or bright! I assure you that a sky-blue paper makes me shudder, while a yellow one turns me absolutely faint."

"Does it? How awkward for you!" Ethel really was very unresponsive. "It must be as bad as not being able to ride with one's back to the horses."

"Alas! I am far too sensitive to outward impressions.

I often curse the day when I was born with the artist temperament and the poet soul." An anathema, it must be confessed, which was totally undeserved by Percy's birthday.

"Indeed." Ethel was not in the least interested in Percy Welford's conversation, and she was too anxious just then to pretend that she was. It is only when things are going well with us that we can simulate an interest which we do not feel in the affairs of our friends and neighbours. This is the reason why happy people are more popular as a rule than unhappy ones.

"But I did not come here to talk about wall-papers," said Percy suddenly, for once in his life putting himself and his opinions on one side, and being a better man in consequence ever afterwards. "I came to ask you to marry me."

"To ask me to marry you? Don't you know that I am engaged to Captain Le Mesurier?"

"Yes; I know that. But I also know that circumstances have supervened which might induce the captain to reconsider his decision; and if that is so, I want to tell you that, whatever happens, it is always open to you to regain your place in society by becoming Mrs. Percy Welford." Strong feeling might make Percy act like a gentleman; but it was incapable of making him speak like one.

Ethel tossed her head scornfully. "I suppose you are referring to that absurd report about the Harland diamond. Captain Le Mesurier knows as much about it as you do, and he has never insulted me by suggesting that the malicious gossip of a pack of old women could ever come between himself and me."

"You mean that the captain loves you so well that he is willing to marry you to show that he believes you are innocent?"

"Yes; and though I cannot accept your offer, believe me that I appreciate your generous motives in proposing to do the same."

In that moment Percy Welford grew up and became a man. "I am not proposing to do the same," he said. "Captain Le Mesurier is willing to marry you because he believes you to be innocent; I am anxious to marry you although I know you to be guilty. Therefore he and I do not stand on the same platform, Miss Harland, nor love you in an equal degree."

Ethel started up from her seat, and her face grew very pale. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that I was in London on the day when you took the pink diamond from its accustomed place, and that I saw you go to the bank, disguised as a lady of fashion, and fetch it. I was so surprised to see you dressed as a fine lady that I did not venture to speak to you; but I remembered the incident, as I have remembered everything connected with you since first you made me love you in spite of myself; and when I heard Mr. Fenton's story of the pink diamond, I understood at once that you had disguised yourself as your sister, and taken the diamond out of the bank in her name."

There was a moment's silence, and then Ethel said: "Have you mentioned this to anybody?"

Percy drew himself to his full five-foot-six, and answered proudly: "Never; and I never will as long as I live. I am the only person who knows your secret, and I would die rather than disclose it; but I want you to let me devote the rest of my life to keeping it inviolate and to making you happy."

Ethel's eyes filled with tears. She knew Percy well enough to understand what this proposal meant to him, whose religion was conventionality and whose presiding goddess was Mrs. Grundy; and she realized how much he must love her for such a proposal to be possible to him. And because a perfectly pure and unselfish affection transforms, for the time being, every weakling into a man and

every man into a gentleman, Ethel instinctively did homage to Percy Welford.

In the busy traffic of life, human souls—like silver coins—are apt to lose some of their value and to become defaced. But now and again, in the white light of an exalting emotion, the image and superscription which they bear become plain, and the image and superscription are not Caesar's. It is in moments such as these that we grasp the truth that this world which we, in our ignorant cynicism, have regarded as a den of thieves, is none other than the Father's House—defiled, it may be, for a time by the sordid doings of the money-changers, but the Father's House still.

There is much healing power in faith—and not least in the faith which human beings have in one another; but there is a greater healing power in the charity which loves on even after hope has been destroyed and faith has been shattered. Therefore Ethel Harland's view of life was ever afterwards wider and truer because of the revelation which had been vouchsafed to her of the strength of love as shown forth by a man she had hitherto despised.

When Jack returned to Silverhampton he found, to his dismay, that Ethel had disappeared, leaving no address behind her; and neither his aunt Camilla, nor anybody else, could give him any clue as to where she was hiding herself.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *JACK'S APPEAL.*

“But yet that folks are all like you  
I don't believe, and shouldn't care to :  
There is a friendship that rings true  
Through all the ills that flesh is heir to.”

**I**N spite of all his endeavours Jack could obtain no clue to Ethel's whereabouts. She had left Silverhampton immediately after Percy Welford's visit, and had told no one where she was going. So poor Jack had to possess his soul in patience—a most unsatisfactory possession, as most of us know who have tried it ; and he also had to persuade himself that Ethel's sudden and mysterious disappearance did not throw a lurid light on the matter of the pink diamond. That she was unwise to have run away in this summary manner, he admitted ; but that she could in any circumstances ever be anything worse than unwise, he would not allow himself to suggest even to himself. Fortunately Jack Le Mesurier was not a person with a vivid imagination ; which saved him and his friends a great deal of trouble. To a reporter or a novelist imagination may be a necessary evil ; to a private individual it is an unmitigated nuisance, and to the private individual's friends a positive curse.

Jack continued to write letters to Ethel at her Sunnydale address, in the hope that her grandparents would forward them to her ; for though they professed that they did not



know where she was, he had a shrewd idea that they were deceiving him for their own purposes. But writing affectionate letters to people who apparently take no notice of them, is dreary work, and accords more with the popular notion of prayer than of correspondence. Which of us, at some time or other, has not heard really God-fearing persons retail, as a remarkable coincidence, the story of an obvious and direct answer to prayer? And yet these good people would have been astonished beyond measure if they had not received the reply to a dinner-invitation by return of post! Which merely proves that the religious instinct and the sense of humour are situated on different sides of the human brain.

At the appointed time Elfrida Harland returned home, and was duly informed by Mr. Fenton of the loss of the pink diamond, and the suspicions which this loss had aroused.

"Of course you will not prosecute," concluded Mr. Fenton, "though I endeavoured to frighten Captain Le Mesurier into restoring the jewel by pretending that you would."

"Why 'of course'?"

The lawyer raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Because you are dealing with your own sister."

"But I am also dealing with my own diamond," suggested Miss Harland.

"My dear young lady, you surely do not mean to suggest the possibility of instituting legal proceedings against Miss Ethel Harland?"

"That is precisely what I do intend."

"Pray, then, reconsider your determination," remonstrated Mr. Fenton. "It would be a most unchristian act, believe me; and, what is worse, it would involve you in the social disgrace which it would entail. I must beseech you in this matter to allow yourself to be guided by me."

Elfrida smiled. Mr. Fenton's order of putting things amused her. "It is also a most unchristian act to take what does not belong to you," she remarked.

"Of course, of course—most unchristian, I admit; and there is no one who approves of Christianity more thoroughly, and endorses its precepts more heartily, than I do. But there are other things in the world beside Christianity, my dear young lady, and we must consider them; we must indeed."

"I never heard of such things; and I am sure it would not be right to consider them even if I had. Do you know that you are preaching rank heathenism?"

"My dear Miss Harland, how can you say such things, and about me of all people? Have I not just told you that I consider religion a most admirable thing for every one, and most especially for young people whose characters and habits are as yet unformed?" he said, as if he were recommending some particular medicine.

"You talk about religion as you would talk about cod-liver oil."

Mr. Fenton looked shocked. "I must beg you not to speak so flippantly about sacred matters; it positively pains me to hear you do so. In my young days people were brought up to feel a certain amount of reverence for holy things, and I am thankful to say that the habit still clings to me; but, as I said just now, religion, like everything else, must be kept in its proper place, and not allowed to invade provinces which do not rightly come under its jurisdiction."

"You mean that there is a time to be good and a time to be clever, and it is a mistake to try and do two things at once?"

Mr. Fenton was slightly ruffled, as was but natural. The man who enjoys being made fun of by an impertinent young woman, must either be more than twice or less

than half as clever as she is ; and Mr. Fenton was neither one nor the other.

"I did not come here to discuss ethics with you," he said, somewhat stiffly. "I came to ask what were your instructions regarding the theft of the Harland diamond, and what means you would desire to be taken towards its recovery."

"My instructions are that you shall write to Captain Le Mesurier, who you say is acting for my sister in this matter, and tell him that I intend to prosecute immediately unless the stone is returned."

The lawyer shook his head. "It is a most unsisterly act, and will, I am convinced, cause people to think and speak ill of you."

"I cannot help that ; and I don't care in the least what people say or think about me."

"I wish with all my heart you would be guided by me."

"Well, I sha'n't," replied Elfrida, who had had too much of her own way all her life to stand opposition patiently. "And, by the way, do you think Captain Le Mesurier's devotion to my sister will stand the test of a public prosecution?"

Mr. Fenton looked up quickly : so the wind blew this way, did it? A woman's badinage puzzled and irritated him ; he did not consider humour a womanly attribute at all ; but jealousy was a thoroughly feminine quality which he could understand and allow for. "I fancy it will," he said slowly.

"Do you mean to say you think he will go on caring for her even after he is convinced that she stole my diamond?" asked Elfrida, trying to speak carelessly, but unable altogether to hide the anxiety in her voice.

"He never will be convinced ; he is the sort of fellow that will go on caring for a woman through thick and thin.

Have I not told you that he was convinced of her innocence even when the Harland diamond was blazing on his own finger? And can the folly men call love go farther than that?"

"I suppose a man who wasn't in love would have thought she had stolen it."

"A fool who wasn't in love would have known she had."

"He must be frightfully fond of her," Elfrida said wistfully.

"He is ridiculously fond of her; there is not the slightest doubt of that. But that is no reason why you should lower your social position by proving to the world that your twin sister is a thief."

"Then do you think he would marry her in the face of that?"

"I am perfectly certain he would; he is just the plucky sort of young fool to do an idiotic thing of that kind, and cut his own throat for the rest of his life. I have no patience with such nonsense—none at all!"

"Still it is rather fine, don't you think, to like some one else so much better than oneself?"

"Fine, do you call it? I cannot for the life of me see any fineness in it. Why, bless my soul! how should we all get on in this world if we kept putting some ridiculous woman between ourselves and our own interests in that way? It is arrant folly, that is what it is; and calling it by sentimental names doesn't make it any the less foolish that I can see."

"You mean that there would be fewer successful men in the world than there are at present if every one 'went about doing good'?"

Again Mr. Fenton looked shocked. "My dear young lady, I must beg of you not to quote Scripture in that flippant way. It is a most reprehensible habit for young persons to fall into, and is with difficulty cured when once

it is formed. As I have known you ever since you were a baby, I look upon myself as a kind of father to you ; and therefore you must pardon me if I take too much upon myself in pointing out to you these little errors of speech."

Elfrida's eyes twinkled. "Then you consider it irreverent to apply the precepts of the Bible to commonplace events?"

"Most irreverent; surely your own good taste confirms my opinion."

"Is it beside the mark to inquire whether you think it irreverent to act according to the precepts of the Bible in everyday life?"

Now Mr. Fenton was one of those excellent men who would rather have gone to the stake than not wear a top hat on Sunday; therefore he felt he did well to be angry when a chit of a girl, young enough to be his granddaughter, took upon herself to reprove him in this manner. "My dear Miss Harland, as I have told you before, it is a mistake to confound things which are intrinsically diverse. Religion is religion, and business is business, and you will succeed in neither if you do not keep them properly apart. I have always done so; and I flatter myself that I have never neglected either of them; though if I had introduced religion into my business relations, and business capacity into my religious life, I should be neither the rich man nor the accredited churchwarden that I am at present."

"I will now say good-morning," added Mr. Fenton, rising from his seat; "but before doing so I must utter a final entreaty that you will come to a different conclusion with reference to your dealings with your sister. Forgive me for speaking strongly, but I feel strongly; and, believe me, I know better than you do, and so am competent to advise you in this matter."

Elfrida said good-bye to her old friend with the irritation

which we all feel towards the people who know better than we do ; and when he had gone, she fell to musing on the love that Jack Le Mesurier was capable of giving in such full measure, and to wondering whether or no he would break off his engagement if she persisted in the course she was now pursuing. It would make all the difference in the world to her if he did, she thought ; so the temptation to try him still further proved too much for her.

Her meditations were broken in upon by Lady Silverhampton, who was ushered into the room in the most elegant of toilettes.

"You darling, how sweet of you to be at home ! I am dying for some luncheon, and I knew you would give me some if you were in. There's no one lunching with me to-day, and I really cannot take my meals alone with Silverhampton day after day ; it is like solitary confinement and nuns and hermits and things."

"I am so glad you have come, dear, for I want to talk to you about something," replied Elfrida graciously ; "I want to know how much a man will stand before he throws a woman over. I've been pondering the matter by myself, and I've consulted my solicitor about it ; but I cannot arrive at any definite conclusion."

"Can't you ? Well, I'll help you. I always know more law than a lawyer does, because I'm a woman. If I were a judge, there would be a lot of time saved, because I should know at a glance whether the prisoner were innocent or guilty, and no amount of evidence would alter my decision, and so no witnesses would have to be called," said her ladyship, settling herself down for a comfortable chat.

"Still, this is a question of love and not of law."

"Then all the easier to learn and the pleasanter to practise ! What was your question, my dear girl ? Do you

know, I hardly ever hear people's questions because I am so busy getting the answers ready."

"How much will a man stand from a girl before he breaks off his engagement with her?" repeated Miss Harland.

"Anything, except her dressing badly or knowing better than he does. Oh! my dear, haven't you learnt that if a man is attracted by a woman, he will only like her the better for breaking his heart and spoiling his existence; while if he isn't attracted by her, he longs to murder her every time she sneezes? That's why I like men; they don't love us for what we do, but for what we are not. They are dear people!"

"Then what do women like us for?"

"I don't know; they never do like me, so I've no opportunity of judging."

"O Evelyn, what a story! Heaps of women like you immensely."

Lady Silverhampton shook her head. "They like me in the same way that they like olives: I am purely an acquired taste. Things with spicy outsides and stony hearts—such as me and olives, you know—are not suited to the normal feminine palate. I used to hate olives myself, but now I like them; they taste of hair-oil, and remind me of kissing the top of Silverhampton's head. That also, by the way, is an acquired taste."

"Evelyn," said Elfrida solemnly, "do you think a man would go on loving a girl if he found out that she stole things?"

"Oh, stealing is rather a large order, isn't it? Still, he might, if it wasn't anything to eat. I always think it is dreadfully common to steal things to eat; don't you? If I had to steal, I'd much rather take furs or jewellery or something of that kind; it seems so much better style."

"I don't think a man would look at it in that light; you know—

'I could not love thee, dear, so much  
Loved I not honour more.'

"I call that a stupid sort of love-making," said Lady Silverhampton scornfully; "the sort of love-making that a man would apply to his second wife. I always hate a man with a sense of honour, just as I hate a woman with conscientious scruples; it only means that they won't do what you ask them, and is nothing more nor less than disagreeableness and indigestion. You may safely conclude that if people are subject to a sense of honour or to conscientious scruples there is something wrong with their livers."

"But a man would have to be frightfully in love with a girl to marry her after she had been accused of a crime, wouldn't he?"

Lady Silverhampton shrugged her shoulders. "My dear, a man has to be frightfully in love with a girl to marry her at all, unless she has a large fortune—at least, so it seems to me; and even then it is a mistake from his point of view. It must be so dreadfully dull to be married to a woman! It is bad enough to be married to a man, but a woman must be a million times worse."

"I suppose when men are married to us they find themselves sadly disillusioned," sighed Elfrida.

"I don't see that; and it is entirely our own fault if they are. I have been married for twenty years, and Silverhampton still thinks, when I hurt his feelings, that it is merely unintentional stupidity on my part. But it does him a lot of good, all the same—in fact, more than if he knew I was setting him straight, because then he would have to go on doing tiresome things just to show me that they were not tiresome, and that would bore me most awfully."



"Then what does he do now?"

"He winces at my nasty speeches, which he thinks are only clumsy, and I pretend I haven't seen him wince; and then he takes care never to expose himself again in that way to my unconscious irony, and loves me with the protective tenderness which all men feel towards stupid and amiable women. Silverhampton is devoted to me; and deservedly so, because I manage him so well."

"Evelyn, you are very clever!"

"Oh! I'm clever enough. As the perfection of art is to conceal art, so the perfection of cleverness is to conceal cleverness; and people always say, 'Lady Silverhampton is a kind little woman, but nothing much in her, don't you know?'"

"How do you manage to conceal your cleverness so successfully?" Elfrida asked.

"Chiefly by dressing well. It is only the badly dressed women who are ever suspected of being intelligent. A ready-made gown will give a woman a reputation for learning far sooner than any university degree; and if she does her hair badly, or, still better, does not do it at all, she is acknowledged to be an artist as well as a scholar."

"I think if a man stuck to a girl after she had stolen things he would forgive her anything," persisted Elfrida; "don't you? And I confess that my faith in masculine human nature does not rise to the height of believing such a thing possible."

"My dear child, masculine human nature can stand anything but being contradicted, and feminine human nature can stand anything but being esteemed. That horrid old Lord Saltyre once said that I was a most estimable woman, and I've thirsted for his blood ever since."

"What made him say such a vile thing about you of all people, Evelyn?"

"He bored me with long tales about 'unearned incre-

ments,' and I listened. I thought they were animals, and I'm always fond of animals, you know, and interested in them; and these seemed to increase more rapidly than even rabbits, judging by his statistics."

"There is the gong for lunch," said Elfrida, rising; "come and have some."

"Dearest of friends, I would gladly share your last ortolan with you, such is my unselfishness," replied Lady Silverhampton, following Miss Harland downstairs.

Elfrida had not been back in town many days before Jack Le Mesurier called upon her; but as she had made up her mind beforehand not to accede to his entreaties, she wisely decided not to listen to them, and therefore was not at home to him. Daily Jack called at the house in Mayfair, and daily was refused admittance. Then he wrote to Miss Harland, telling her that Mr. Fenton had informed him of her decision, and entreating her to reconsider it. But Elfrida remained as adamant for a week. At the end of a week she began to think how nice it would be to see Jack Le Mesurier again, as she was beginning to forget the exact shape of his nose.

It is a remarkable thing that the more persistently we think of people, the less distinctly we remember them. The absent faces of our dearest ones become blurred in our recollections, like photographs that are out of focus; while memory can call up with startling vividness the countenances of the butcher and baker and candlestick-maker with whom we dealt a dozen years ago.

Thus it came to pass that Elfrida had thought so much about Jack since she saw him last that she had forgotten what he was like; and as she was too healthy-minded a woman to practise gratuitous self-denial which benefited nobody (a most profitless and embittering form of spiritual exercise!) she wrote and told him that he might call upon her on a certain afternoon.

It was a dreary day when Jack at last gained admittance to the house in Mayfair—one of those dull afternoons when it seemed too early to ring for lights and too late to do without them. Nevertheless, Elfrida could see, even in the subdued light of her drawing-room, how white and worn he had grown since they met last; and at the sight of his misery a pang of remorse shot through her heart. It was cruel to hurt a good man so; and when Elfrida saw the visible effects of her cruelty, she suffered a passing qualm of repentance. But intermittent repentance—like intermittent exercise—merely upsets the system, and does nobody any good.

“I know you have sent for me because you are going to be merciful,” Jack began.

“To you, perhaps, but not to anybody else. I have sent for you so that I may make you understand, once for all, that your path and Ethel’s must of necessity lie far apart; and to beg you to give up the idea of marrying a girl who is so obviously unworthy of you.”

“Then it is a pity that I have come, Miss Harland; and it will be a mere waste of time for me to remain.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” said Elfrida, and her voice shook with excitement in spite of all her efforts to keep it steady, “that you still believe in Ethel and love her after all that has happened?”

“A thousand times more even than I did at first, because she needs me a thousand times more than she did then.”

“So you think that love should be measured according to our need rather than our deserts?”

“I don’t think about measuring it at all,” replied Jack simply. “I only know that the woman I love is in trouble, and that the more down-in-the-mouth she is, the more determined am I to stand up for her and comfort her. I am a stupid fellow at expressing myself, and have not the knack of putting my feelings into words, but when I once care

for a person I do care for them, and nothing can choke me off."

"Do you mean to say that you would stick to Ethel even if she were sent to prison for stealing the famous Harland diamond?"

"Of course I would; and marry her the moment she came out. I wanted to marry her at once, and take all the burden of her troubles upon my shoulders; but she wouldn't hear of it."

"Don't you believe she really did steal it?"

Jack flushed a deep red. "If you were a man I should knock you down for daring to ask me such a question, Miss Harland; as it is I can only bid you good-afternoon."

And he marched out of the room and out of the house, banging the doors behind him as only righteous masculine anger can bang them.

After he had gone, Elfrida sat down and cried.

For the next few days Captain Le Mesurier was very miserable indeed; as he could glean no news of Ethel he grew increasingly anxious about her, and he felt that it was hopeless any longer to expect mercy at the hands of Miss Harland. Then, to his surprise, he received the following note from her:—

"DEAR CAPTAIN LE MESURIER,—

"I have changed my mind, and want to speak to you at once. Come and see me to-morrow afternoon at four.

"Yours sincerely,

"ELFRIDA HARLAND."

Jack presented himself at the house in Mayfair at the appointed hour. Of course he was relieved to find that Miss Harland was melting; but at that time he was so anxious at Ethel's prolonged absence and silence that he could give his attention to nothing else. What was the use of Elfrida's clemency if it came too late for her sister

to receive it, he wondered? It was now several weeks since Ethel had so suddenly vanished from Silverhampton, and Jack knew no more as to her whereabouts than he did on the day she left. So it was with a heavy heart that he inquired whether Miss Harland were at home, and followed the butler up the familiar staircase.

Great, however, was his amazement, and still greater his joy, on entering the drawing-room, to find no Elfrida waiting to greet him with her usual stateliness, but in her stead—Ethel.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?*

"You took my faith and tore its threads  
Into a thousand tiny shreds,  
And left me here without it.  
Had I defied your magic sway  
My faith would be intact to-day;  
So let us throw the rags away,  
And talk no more about it."

"MY darling, where have you been hiding all this long time?" asked Jack when the first fury of the lovers' greetings had in a measure subsided; "you have nearly broken my heart by keeping away from me so long."

"My dear old boy, sit down and I will tell you the whole story; only you must promise not to interrupt."

"I shall not interrupt you, but I expect your sister will."

"No; she cannot." And Ethel sighed.

"Then tell me your story at once, sweetheart; for I am simply dying to hear it."

"Once upon a time," Ethel began, "there was a rich nobleman who had twin granddaughters."

"Oh! I know that, dear; that is ancient history. I want to know the story of the last few weeks."

"Well, I am coming to the story of the last few weeks if you will give me time; but the last few weeks could not have come to pass if they had not been preceded by the last five-and-twenty years; could they?"

"I don't know. I never thought about it."

"And besides, my dear Jack, it is awfully rude to speak of anything in the life of a living woman as 'ancient history.' Where are your manners?"

"I haven't been able to attend to them of late, I have been so wretched about you."

"Well, then, rub them up now, and listen politely to my story. The rich nobleman adopted one of his granddaughters on condition that she should be entirely cut off from her sister and her mother's people; and he brought her up under his own eye, and taught her always to believe in money and never to believe in men. So she grew hard and bitter and cynical, and thought that all the men who wanted to marry her were in love with her fortune and not with herself."

"And I dare say they were; but what has all that to do with you and me, sweetheart?"

"Wait; you will see. Well, this poor rich girl was left alone in the world with a large fortune; and she made up her mind that she would never marry until she found a man who loved her for herself alone, and who didn't care a rap for her money or her rank. But she couldn't do this as long as she was known to be a great heiress, you see."

"Well?"

"So she pretended to be a poor little governess; and then she met an adorable man—the nicest and handsomest man in the whole world—who fell in love with her just as she was. She knew that he wasn't after her money, because he hadn't an idea that she had any; and it was so delightful to her to feel that at last somebody cared for her for her own sake."

Jack looked puzzled. "I don't quite see what you are driving at, dear."

"Don't you? I am trying to make you understand that Ethel and Elfrida are one and the same person, and that

the rich Elfrida loves you because you loved the poor Ethel. It is like the princess in the fairy-tale who said to her lover, 'You kissed me when I was an old woman; I kiss you now that I am a young princess.'

"But it is impossible—utterly impossible!" exclaimed Jack, rising from his seat and striding up and down the room, as he always did when he was excited. "I don't believe it."

"You must believe it, for it is the truth."

"Do you mean to tell me that the Miss Harland I met at the Silverhamptons' was yourself masquerading? Oh! no, no; the very idea is absurd."

"Absurd or not, it is the truth," replied Elfrida meekly; "I swear it is." She was beginning to see that her fears were about to be realized, and that Jack was going to be as angry as, in her despondent moments, she had dreaded. "Don't you know me now, and can't you recognize me in my shabby old clothes?" she continued, dropping into an indifferent drawl, and speaking in Elfrida's usual *blasé* manner; "it is fine feathers that make fine birds, you see."

"Good heavens! I see the likeness when you speak like that," exclaimed Jack; "but even now I cannot believe it. And may I ask," he continued with rising anger, "if your pretended affection for me was part of the masquerading, too?"

"No, no; a thousand times no. I loved you with my whole heart when I was Ethel and when I was Elfrida. There was no pretence about that."

Jack's face was white and stern. "What ever induced you to play such a mad prank as this?"

"I have told you. The poor rich girl we were talking about was so sick of being liked only for the sake of her money that she felt she must find one man who cared for herself alone, or else she would die of loneliness and



misery ; and when at last she did find him, she nearly went mad with the joy of it. And I never told you an actual lie, dear ; I didn't, really. It is true that Ethel and I are now separated by an impassable gulf, and that she is beyond the reach of my friendship or my money, and that you can never marry her. I never said a word to you about my sister that wasn't true. Oh ! Jack, can't you understand what it meant to the rich girl to find a man who could love her like that ?”

“ Perfectly ; and when she found that she could fool him to the extent of making him believe she was poor, she thought she would have some more fun out of the poor idiot ; so then she tried to fool him to the extent of believing that she was dishonest. Truly it was an ingenious device to prove what a fool a man in love could be !”

“ But she didn't succeed in making him think she was dishonest,” continued the girl coaxingly ; “ that is where the man was such a dear. He trusted her and stuck to her in spite of everything ; and so, for the first time in her life, she believed in a man's love.”

“ And believing in it made it her plaything,” said Jack bitterly. “ How like a woman ! I should have thought that an inferior kind of love would have been good enough to play with ; but women's toys must be only of the best.”

“ But, Jack dear, I did so want to know if you really loved me.”

“ And couldn't you trust me without deceiving me ? Surely you might have discovered some less cruel way of proving to yourself that I was not quite such a cad as you had been pleased to imagine !”

The girl's eyes filled with tears. “ Jack, are you very angry with me ?”

“ Yes ; angrier than I have ever been with anybody in my life before.”

"Oh dear! oh dear! and when I began it I thought you would just laugh when you found it out. I never imagined then that you would be vexed; truly, I didn't."

"Not vexed at being made the dupe of a fine lady? Not vexed at being fooled by the woman I loved, and made a laughing-stock to the whole world? Not vexed at having my trust betrayed and my affection trampled in the dust? It strikes me that you think it takes a good deal to vex a man, Miss Harland!"

Elfrida began to cry. "Won't you forgive me, Jack? I am so awfully sorry I did it now; but at the time it only seemed to me a good joke, and I never dreamed you would take it so seriously."

"I am afraid I cannot forgive you. It has gone too deep for that."

"Do you mean to say that after the way you've loved and trusted me in what seemed big things, you'll let a little thing like this come between us?"

"It isn't a little thing to me. It is because I loved and trusted you so completely that I cannot forgive you for deceiving me. Don't you see, you have done the very thing I thought it was impossible for you to do? You did not steal the Harland diamond, it is true; but you stole a man's affection under false pretences, which was far worse."

Elfrida only sobbed in reply, but Jack did not attempt to comfort her; he got up from his seat and stood leaning against the mantelpiece with a hard look on his white face. After a few minutes' silence he said coldly: "How did you manage it all? I confess I should like to know the whole of the story. But first tell me, have I ever seen the real Ethel?"

"No."

"Where is she now?"

"She died when she was quite a child, twenty years ago."

## A Double Thread

"I see. And now will you kindly enlighten me as to how you duped me so successfully?"

Elfrida's heart sank at the ominous calmness of Jack's voice: she had never heard him speak in that tone before. There was a stillness about him which was far worse than any loud outburst of fury.

"You see, Jack, very rich people never have the chance of knowing what they themselves or their friends are really like, as no one ever speaks the truth to them; and I grew so sick of my life of empty frivolity and hollow flattery, that I thought it would be so nice to be a poor girl for a bit, and stand or fall by my own merits. It suddenly occurred to me that I could do this by impersonating my dead sister."

"You acted the part well," said Le Mesurier coldly.

"My mother was an actress, you know, and so acting came easy to me; it was no difficulty to me to play the part of an unsophisticated girl."

"So I have learned to my cost."

"I induced my grandparents to leave the neighbourhood where they were known, and where people were aware of Ethel's death, and to come and live at Sunnydale; and as they were entirely dependent upon me, they agreed to my plan; though I confess they were always against it, especially my grandmother. No one in Sunnydale knew anything about us, so it was quite easy for me to take the part of the poor sister while I was there; and as I had no maid there, and dressed badly on purpose, even the people who had known me as Elfrida Harland did not recognize me. Dress makes such a difference in a woman's looks; and, as Ethel, I made myself as dowdy as possible."

"Admirably thought out!"

"I only came to Sunnydale as Ethel at intervals; and that merely carried out the idea that I was in a situation with stated holidays. For the rest of the year I was in society as Elfrida."

Jack's lip curled. "Most cleverly contrived all through!"

"When I took the pink diamond out of the bank, it never occurred to me that there would be a fuss about it; I only wanted to give it to you, because of the magic powers of the stone."

"Ah! There you did not display your usual sharpness."

"I really was getting rather tired of the farce; and yet I was afraid to end it, lest I should end my engagement to you at the same time. When, to my surprise, I was suspected of stealing my own diamond, I wondered if you would love me enough to marry me in spite of shame as well as of poverty; and I made up my mind to try if you would. I thought that if you went on caring for me after that, you would go on caring for me after discovering how I had deceived you; so I decided to put you to this supreme test, and then to tell you the whole truth."

"And my folly exceeded even your wildest anticipations, I understand."

"No, no; your goodness fulfilled even the high ideal I had formed of it. Oh! Jack, can't you forgive me?"

Jack shook his head.

"But, Jack dear, I love you so."

"You love me, and yet you made a fool of me! No, Miss Harland, I cannot believe in such love as that."

"I only did it to make sure of you. Can't you understand how sick I was of shadows, and how I wanted to find one true heart?"

"And so, having found it, you broke it to see if it was breakable. Well, it was."

"Then must everything be at an end between us?" Elfrida pleaded; "surely, surely you cannot mean that!"

"But I do mean it. Don't you see that now you have once deceived me I can never trust you again? And love without trust is impossible. But oh! how I loved you and believed in you!" Then at last Jack's voice broke and

with one great sob he rushed out of the room and out of the house, leaving Elfrida alone with her misery, while the house of cards which her folly had built tumbled about her ears.

The days came and went, and still Jack did not relent towards Elfrida. People in their third decade do not readily forgive, because they are still young enough to expect perfection and to be offended at the absence of it. Under thirty, we are annoyed because our fellow-creatures are neither angels nor fairy princes; after thirty, we should be equally annoyed if they were. Which proves that youth is not the time of romance; for it is easy to find beauty in a knightly hero and pathos in an angel's tears. Any schoolgirl can go as far as that; but it requires the seeing eye and the understanding heart to perceive the heroism of self-sacrifice amidst sordid surroundings, and the beauty of "a white soul clothed in a satyr's form." The highest love—like the highest art—is the love that sees the beauty which is hidden from the common gaze; and, seeing it, is able to interpret it.

Sir Roger soon heard of the state of affairs from Mr. Fenton, and he sent for his nephew in the hope of inducing the latter to forgive Elfrida. At the bottom of his heart the old man was delighted with the girl's escapade—there was an insolent daring about it which appealed to him; and he also could not fail to relish the fact that his quixotic nephew had been made a fool of. The mistakes of superior people never fail to afford us a certain amount of unholy joy.

But though his uncle argued late and argued long, Jack would not be moved. He was now as determined not to marry Elfrida as he had been before to marry Ethel. And Jack's will was as strong as Sir Roger's, though he had not so much wit to back it up.

"My dear boy," said the baronet, after a long conversation on the subject, wherein both men had done full justice

to the obstinacy of the Le Mesurier race ; "to decline to marry a woman because she has deceived you, seems to me as foolish as to decline to eat your dinner because it is edible. What is a woman made for but to deceive you, I should like to know? For my part, I hate transparent women ; they are as unfitted for the world as clear glass windows are for a church, and spoil the whole effect."

"I like women who speak the truth," persisted Jack.

"Do you? What a strange and perverted taste ! I wish you had known my aunt Lavinia : she was the most truthful woman I ever met, and I confess her peculiar charm was quite thrown away upon me. She prided herself upon saying exactly what she thought ; and I have often wondered whether her thoughts were unusually offensive, or whether her expression of them was her only peculiarity."

Jack did not answer ; his mind was so full of Elfrida and her cruel treatment of him, that he failed to hear more than half of what his uncle had said ; so the old man chuckled to himself and rambled on :

"I shall never forget how she used to make people jump. There was no spot on their reputations, no blemish in their persons, that she did not openly rail at ; and all the time she imagined that she was saving people's souls, while in reality she was merely spoiling their tempers."

"I see," said Jack, with absent politeness.

"She was a strict old lady, and a strong church-woman, and she always laid great stress upon purity of doctrine and of life ; by which she meant rigid adherence to the teachings of Calvin, and strict abstinence from the use of tobacco. By the way, Jack, you are not listening to me."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Jack, pulling himself together.

"Pray don't apologize. I always talk for my own pleasure and never for other people's ; and if they prefer not to

listen, I am delighted for them to enjoy themselves in their own way."

Jack stayed on at Greystone because his uncle seemed pleased to have him, and also because there was now no particular reason why he should be elsewhere. As a rule people are content to be anywhere and to do anything, provided they do not want to be anywhere or to do anything else. It is only when our hearts can prove an *alibi* that we begin to kick against the pricks.

There was that sadness over the country that always comes in the autumn. Now and then the year seemed to make a final struggle to recall the departing summer, and there were days as warm as in July; but at other times the shadow of the dreaded winter fell upon the land, and blotted out the fading sunshine. Summer had read upon her leafy walls the fiery handwriting which told her that her reign was over, and her kingdom about to be given to another; and those who had feasted with her saw the sign, and felt their hearts grow heavy within them.

Jack and his uncle got on better together than they had ever done before; for the former no longer resented Sir Roger's strictures on the female sex now that he had himself proved it so eminently unsatisfactory in its dealings with men; and Sir Roger, in his cynical way, was sorry for his nephew, and, after his own fashion, was kind to him. It is easy to sympathize with people who fail where we have failed—this is ordinary humanity; but to rejoice with those who succeed where we have failed is a more difficult matter—that is Christianity.

The day after Jack's arrival at Greystone he walked across the park to the rectory to see Mr. Cartwright; and, as the rector was not at home, the young man wandered into the old-fashioned garden, there to wait till its master's return.

"Good-morning to you, sir," said Clutterbuck, who was

very busy doing nothing, as usual ; " I hope I see you in as good health as is to be expected at this lugubrious time of the year. Eh ! it's an unhealthy season is autumn ; just the time for famines and pestilences and all such disorders."

" I don't know that autumn is worse than any other season," said Jack consolingly.

" Then you have never studied the matter, sir ; that's all I can say. All the year the air is full of germs and microscopes floating about ; but in the autumn they come down and settle upon the folks, as it were ; and then we have all these diseases. The only cure is thunder ; that's the healthiest thing I ever came across. And we are wonderfully favoured with thunder hereabouts ; we get quite a century of storms in this latitude. Yet thunder is bad enough in its way."

" Very bad indeed, and sometimes dangerous."

" That it is, sir," agreed the gardener, smacking his lips ; " there are few things, as you say, more full of danger than a thunderstorm. My grandfather, as was, lost three sheep and a wife through thunder, troubles never coming in shoals but in battalions, as the saying is."

" What a sad thing ! How did it happen ?"

" Well, you see, sir, it was in this way. The sheep was struck dead on the spot through standing under a tree for shelter, and my grandmother drank beer that the thunder had turned sour and never was the same woman afterwards. It brought on rheumatics in the joints ; at least so I've heard tell."

" That was very sad for your grandfather," said Captain Le Mesurier sympathetically.

" Well, the sheep was a bad business, I admit ; but there was two sides to my grandmother's rheumatics, so to speak. For she couldn't walk about and follow grandfather all over the place, as she'd done afore ; so that when she fell to



nagging of him—as is a habit that all women enjoy, even the best of them—there was a way of escape provided, as my grandfather piously remarked.”

“It was a pity that the excellent man was afflicted with a nagging wife. Surely he did not deserve it.”

“Well, Captain, that is as may be; nobody knows a man’s deserts save the man himself, and he is a lineament judge, as you may say. But there’s worse things than a woman’s temper, sir, begging your pardon; it shows there’s spirit in her. I don’t mind a regular tantrum now and then, provided there’s a good long interview between them. But grandfather had all sorts, being as he was married four times; and each time he chose the percise opposite to what he’d just suffered from; which was but natural, seeing that nobody knows where the shoe pinches so well as him as has just taken it off.”

“It would be interesting to know what type of wife he finally recommended. The opinion of a man of such profound and wide experience would be worth having.”

“Eh, sir, that’s true; true as fiction, so to speak, and there’s nothing stranger, as they say. What my grandfather said was this: that a wife in the house was like a fire in the summer—it made the place too hot for you, but there was no getting your dinner cooked without it.”

“But what sort did he like best?” Jack persisted.

Clutterbuck scratched his chin thoughtfully. “Well, sir, as far as I can recollect, he found them much of a muchness, as the saying is; when they were there he was allus a-grumbling at ’em, and when they were gone he was allus a-singing of their praises to the one that came next. Which was no satisfaction to nobody, as far as I can see. Still I have heard him say that a wife with a tongue was bad, and a wife with a temper was worse, and a wife that’s hard o’ hearing was worse still; but there was none on them to compare to a wife with relations. And quite right, too!

For what does a woman want with relations when she has got a husband, I should like to know?"

"They do seem a superfluity in that case, I must admit; though it never struck me in this light before."

"Eh, sir, you never spoke a truer word; supernumeraries they are, and supernumeraries they will be, as long as you have 'em hanging about the place and putting a lot of rebellionism into your wife's head. But I've never been troubled with botherations of that sort; whenever my missis got any nonsense into her head I put my foot down upon it immediately, and nipped the bud at the spring, as the saying is."

Jack sighed. "I am afraid your grandfather was right, Clutterbuck, and that all women are much of a muchness."

"They are, sir; and what the gentry want with wives I can't tell, seeing they have servants to cook for them and they can afford to send their shirts to the wash."

"It does seem funny!" Jack admitted.

"Still, Captain, they are purty creatures that the gentry marry! I shall never rightly forget Sir Roger's sisters—your aunts, as one might say: they were sweet purty souls afore they were married, when they lived up at the hall yonder." And Clutterbuck pointed to Greystone nestling among the trees.

"I can call to mind as if it was yesterday," he continued, "the time when they were represented at Court. They were dressed in pure white from head to foot, with long flowing trains, and had feathers on their heads and bunches of white roses in their hands. We read the description of their costumes in the *Weekly News*; but, bless you, sir! it was more like reading the Book of Revelations than an ordinary newspaper. I read it aloud to my missis, and we both fairly cried; it made us feel so religious-like, and as if it was Sunday."

"I suppose my aunts were very pretty."

## A Double Thread

“I should just think they were, sir; with angels’ faces, few and far between, as the saying is. And now they are dead, and your father is dead; and the only one of the family that’s left is the only ugly one of the four—the present Sir Roger. Eh, dear! it’s the same with folks as with begonias—the handsomest ones die and the ugly ones are spared. By which token I should doubt if you would be a long-liver yourself, sir,” added Clutterbuck pleasantly, feeling that he was paying an elegant and graceful compliment.

Jack received the compliment in the spirit in which it was uttered, and bowed. “I never saw my aunts, but I can remember what a good-looking man my father was.”

“He was, sir, sure enough; but they were none on ’em as good-looking as your mother. She was the very pink of perfection, as they say.”

“So I have heard, but I cannot remember her. She died when I was a baby, you know.”

“More’s the pity, sir! She was a sight to make an old man young again; though that would be no recommendation in your case, you being so young yourself at the time. Eh, she was wonderful handsome, she was, and no mistake; and so thought both your father and Sir Roger (he was Mr. Le Mesurier at that time, the late Sir Roger being still alive).”

“That I have also heard.”

“Eh, Captain, they were both fairly doited over her; and no wonder, with such an evangelical face as she’d got. Sir Roger (he was Mr. Le Mesurier at that time, the old Sir Roger being still alive) had set his heart upon marrying her, but she wouldn’t look at him after once she’d set eyes on Mr. Arthur (your father as was). And where was the miracle of that, I should like to know? Did you ever hear tell of a woman who would put up with a little man when there was a big one on the tapestry? But

all the same I don't hold with a woman having two strings to her bow if she can avoid it," added Clutterbuck reprovingly; "for if she does, she is bound to fall to the ground between them."

"It is difficult now to imagine that my uncle was ever devoted to anybody," Jack remarked.

"It is difficult to imagine that roast duck was ever a-swimming on the pond, yet such was the case. And Sir Roger (he was Mr. Le Mesurier at that time, the old Sir Roger being still above ground) was a regular Roman and Julia—or else pretended to be. In fact, it was this that turned him sour, I believe; there being nothing more upsetting to the emotions than a disappointment in love."

Jack smiled bitterly. "It is not improving to the character, I must confess."

"Far from it, sir. If you read the stories of Samson and Delilah, and of Abbeyland and Eloiza, you recognize what a bad effect love-affairs exercise over the destinations of men. Of course it is all writ beforehand in the stars, and there's no gainsaying them; but I'm rare and thankful that it was my fate to get married, and not to fall in love. It saved a world of trouble."

"You seem to have been a great reader of romance, Clutterbuck."

"All my life, sir, reading's been my treat; and I've read everything that I could lay my hands on, from Shakespeare to the sherry-glasses, as the saying is. Eh! but there's wonderful things in books, if you can only read between the pages; and there's nothing more wonderful than what they tell you about love. There's nothing like it in real life, I'll be bound; and that's where the cleverness of books comes in, you see. Why, bless you, sir! I've read in novels afore now of men as couldn't properly enjoy their vittles because some young woman happened to be

in a tantrum with them. Did ye ever hear the like of that, now?" And Clutterbuck obviously felt that he was appealing in vain even to a gentleman's power of imagination.

"I have come across such cases myself," replied Jack drily.

"Have ye now? Well, I should have said it was beyond the bonds of possibility if I hadn't your word to the contrary. In course, if the woman's temper is such that she vents it by overdoing your meat and underdoing your potatoes, no man can stomach either her nor them. It is not in nature that he should. But if she keeps her ill-humour to her conversation, I can't for the life of me see where the harm lies. A woman's tongue must allus be on the work about something or other; and as a man has something better to do than to waste his time in listening to her chitter-chatter, what does it matter to him whether she is talking pleasantly or the reverse?"

"Then don't you listen to what Mrs. Clutterbuck says to you."

The gardener looked at Jack in mild amazement. "In course not, sir; for what should I? For the last forty years her tongue's been on the go, but what it's all been about I haven't the slightest idea, and I doubt if she has. Why, bless you, sir! I don't know what the world would come to if the men began to waste their time in listening to the rubbish that women-folk talk. I take it that a woman is like a mowing-machine; she saves a man a lot of work, but she can't help making a noise, and the man's business is to avail himself of her help and to let the noise put him out as little as possible. In fact a woman's tongue is like a waterfall; when you've lived near it for some time you get so accustomed to it that you don't hear it. At least, that has been my experience, sir; and I take it that the majority of married men will say *Alleluia* to that."

"Good-morning," cried Mr. Cartwright's voice across the garden; "I am afraid that I have kept you waiting a long time; but I had to go and see a sick woman at the other end of the parish."

"Oh! never mind," replied Jack; "Clutterbuck has been entertaining me in your absence, and has done it most thoroughly."

"Clutterbuck is excellent company, as I know by experience," said the rector, as he shook hands with Jack; "he is a man of learning, and a philosopher in his way as well."

"Well, sir, I don't know as I know much about that," demurred the gardener with becoming modesty; "but what I sees I sees, and what I hears I hears, and I forms my own delusions accordingly."

"That is philosophy," interpolated Mr. Cartwright.

"You see, sir, when you keep your eyes open, you hear a good deal more than folks intend you to hear, and you wonder what it is all about. You hear one man crying for the moon, and you know all the while that if he got his heart's desire he'd soon find out that the moon is nothing but a white elephant after all. And you hear another complaining that people don't properly admire him, and you know all the time the reason is that he has kept his ten talons wrapped up in a napkin, as Scripture says, and not made the most of his opportunities. And you hear another man blaspheming because he can't have some particular woman for his wife, and you know all the time that one wife is just as good as another, and that none at all is better than either. Aye, sir, there's a many tears wasted in this world, take my word for it."

"You are right there, Clutterbuck," agreed the rector.

"Ah, sir, sure there's One as knows better what's good for us than we know ourselves. It would never do for the plants to begin dictating to the gardener how he should treat them. If they did, we should have the potatoes asking

for the watering-pot, and the cauliflowers crying for the pruning-knife, and the geraniums calling out for the garden-roller, and everything would be topsy-turvy, and the whole place an omnibus gathering, as it were. And it often seems to me, Captain, as if we was just plants, with a Gardener to look after us as knows His own business a sight better than we do."

Jack nodded. "I am glad to hear that you think that; it is comforting, somehow."

"Eh! but you learn a lot in the garden, sir, when you give your thoughts to it. I often think to myself, when I'm clipping the rose-trees, that the poor things must fancy as I'm a cruel taskmaster to them and a hard man; but they don't know, poor souls! that I'm doing it all for their good, and that if I left them to themselves and never pruned them, they'd soon degravitate into common dog-roses again, which are first-cousin-once-removed to weeds. Why, bless you, sir! the more I set store by a plant, the more I water it and prune it and generally cultivate it; and it strikes me there's One as follows pretty much the same plan with us."

"I think He does," said the rector softly.

"I don't deny, sir, that the watering and the pruning are anything but agreeable at the time to all parties; but you'll never get prize plants without them, if you try till Doomsday and the day after. I'd take my oath on that, if I was black in the face."

"I wonder if it is always bad for people to get what they want," Jack remarked.

"Nine times out of ten it is, sir; and the tenth time they've forgot in a fortnight that they ever wanted the thing at all. Now there was our neighbour's wife, Mrs. Higginson, her that lives in the house with the creeper all over it."

"I know it," said Jack.

"Well, what must she do but set her heart upon keeping

a pig, though, as my missis said to her over and over again, it was against nature to keep a pig when there was only two in family, the wash not being enough to fatten him ; and when you have to fill up the wash with meal and sharps, a pig is a poor job at best. But that was neither here nor there ; and Mrs. Higginson got her own way, as folks allus do sooner or later, specially if they happen to be women."

"And what was the end of it ?"

"The end, sir ? Why, the end was that leanness was sent into Mrs. Higginson's soul as her pig fattened ; for so anxious was she that the wash should not fall short and so fulfil my missis's explanations, that she threw away good vittles, such as Higginson would fairly have relished, and she set the wash-tub above her own wedded husband, as you might say. Which brought its own punishment ; for when the pig was what you might call ready for killing it was attacked by the swine fever, and had to be killed by the public officer, and buried as if it had been an ordinary Christian."

"That was unfortunate for everybody concerned in the transaction," exclaimed Captain Le Mesurier.

"Well, not altogether for everybody," replied Clutterbuck cautiously ; "for when Mrs. Higginson's pig died of swine fever, suspicion fell upon our pigs, as was natural, being next-door neighbours ; and when they were examined by the officer and declared to be healthy, we was presented with a certificate to that effect, which my missis was so proud of that she had it framed and glazed, and it now constitutes one of the prime ornamentations of our front parlour. So all things turn out well for them that don't go flying in the face of Providence, as it were ; but for them that will get their own wilful way in spite of everything, such as Mrs. Higginson for instance, there's nothing but vain-glory and vexation of spirit."



## CHAPTER XIX.

### *PHILIP CARTWRIGHT'S STORY.*

"Upon thy love I made no great demands,  
Nor daily needs before it dared to bring,  
Because I held it such a holy thing  
I feared to touch it with unwashen hands."

AS Jack and Mr. Cartwright strolled back to the house, the former began the story of Elfrida's deception, and concluded it in the rector's study. As Mr. Cartwright had stood by him when he so firmly testified to Ethel's innocence, he felt bound to let the rector know the true state of affairs now, and the reason why the engagement was broken off.

Jack was still very bitter against Elfrida. Had he been as astute a man as his uncle, he would probably have laughed at the whole affair, knowing that he in his turn could be cleverer than any woman if he wished so to be. But Jack was intellectually inferior to Sir Roger, and in proportion more indignant at being taken in. Also, he was an essentially truthful man, and falsehood of any kind was abhorrent to him. Perhaps deceit is of all faults the most difficult to pardon; not so much that it is contemptible in itself, as that it renders further trust so difficult. One may forgive a ship for being unseaworthy; but one is careful to take one's passage in another boat.

The rector listened sympathetically to Jack's story. His heart was full of pity for the young man; yet not so full

but that there was room for pity for the young woman also. Philip was old enough to know that a man must not always be judged by his deeds, and, still less, a woman. Surely the evil which we would not and yet do, is less truly a part of our real selves than the good that we would and do not. At least so Philip Cartwright believed, and so he preached.

When Jack had finished, the rector tried to show him that there were two sides to the question, and that there was something to be said on Miss Harland's behalf. But the two sides of any question do not count among the visions vouchsafed to the young; seeing both sides of a thing is as sure a sign of advancing age as reading with spectacles.

Jack was not in any way malicious or revengeful, but he felt that he could not reinstate Elfrida on the pedestal which she had once, apparently, so fittingly occupied; and he was not going to pretend that he could if he could not. The love which believeth all things is one of the glorious attributes of youth; but the love which endureth all things is a later, and a finer, growth.

In vain did Mr. Cartwright point out to him that Elfrida's scepticism of disinterested affection was natural, considering her experience, and that her desire to prove the reality of his love was pardonable, considering her sex. Many scientific persons defend vivisection as an abstract principle; but it is doubtful if the victims ever enjoy the process. At any rate Jack Le Mesurier did not.

"But, my dear Jack," the rector persisted, "it is a mistake to deal with a woman as one would deal with another man. Believe me, it is."

"I cannot understand all these fine distinctions," replied Jack doggedly; "I make it a rule that if a person has once deceived me I never trust that person again; not so much that I will not as that I cannot."

"But surely the woman that one loves is an exception rather than a rule."

"Yes; but an exception on the other side. The fact that one has trusted her so entirely makes it all the more difficult to trust her again. The bigger a thing is, the more row it makes when it is smashed."

The rector smiled, and Jack went on: "You see, I believed in her when all the world seemed to be against her, and the facts too. Even though she herself had given me a pink diamond, and I knew how rare they are, I would not allow myself to suspect her. I made myself believe that it was either not the Harland diamond at all, or else that her sister had given it to her. In fact, I really arrived at the conclusion that this latter was the correct solution, and that Elfrida was communicating with her sister without my knowledge, and was trying to make some amends to Ethel for her poverty."

"I see; you believed that Elfrida gave Ethel the stone before she went abroad. To tell you the truth, so did I; and that was why I so strongly urged you not to give Ethel up. I knew that Miss Harland was a romantic girl, and I felt that to give her hitherto unlucky sister the stone which was supposed to bring luck to its possessor, was exactly the kind of reparation which would commend itself to a girl of that type."

Jack nodded. "I know; and I felt certain that when Elfrida returned, the mystery would be cleared up. It was the most awful shock to me when I heard that she meant to prosecute her sister. Fool that I was not to see that it was all a bogus scare set up to frighten a credulous ass like myself!" And he ground his teeth savagely.

"You cannot blame yourself for being taken in; everybody was."

"Yes; but everybody had not known her both as Ethel and Elfrida, and so I was the most confounded fool of all.

I cannot imagine now how I could have been such an idiot ; but I was, and that's an end of it !”

“ My dear Le Mesurier, I have no doubt that she acted the part so well that any man would have been taken in. But did it ever strike you that the two girls were the same ?”

“ Never ; never once. She was so utterly different in the two parts, don't you see ? Of course I could see that the two sisters were awfully alike in the face ; but twin sisters often are ; and as they appeared totally different in style and dress and manners and character, it never occurred to me— idiot that I was !—that they were one. You know her mother was an actress, so I suppose acting is in the blood and comes easy to her. Certainly she is one of the cleverest actresses of the day.” And Jack laughed a laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

“ I think that she made a mistake, and did an extremely foolish thing,” said the rector gently ; “ but, all the same, you are too hard upon her.”

“ Shouldn't you be hard upon a woman who had played with your deepest and most sacred feelings ? Hang it all ! she has not only spoiled my belief in her, but she has spoiled my belief in everything else that is beautiful and good. If she, who seemed so perfect, was a lie, how can I ever believe in anything or anybody again ?”

“ I think you misjudge her. She did not deceive you in order to play with you, but in order to prove your love for her. I am an older man than you, Jack, and I have seen terrible havoc made of many lives simply because people are so prone to misjudge one another. If those we love are mean or base or cruel, we had better let them go, however much it may hurt ; but if we let them go only because we think they are mean or base or cruel, and find out too late that they are nothing of the kind, we have spoiled our lives, and probably theirs, for a mere chimera. If our lives are shadowed by misfortune, it is God's doing, and in some

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other world He will make it up to us ; but if they are marred by our own mistakes, it is our own doing, and I do not see how we can expect Him to set it right."

But Jack was obstinate. "I made no mistake about Elfrida's having deceived me."

"No ; but you are making a fatal mistake both about her object in doing so and your mode of dealing with her ?"

"Well, I don't think so."

The two men smoked in silence for a few minutes, and then Philip said : "I have used all my arguments, save one, in order to convince you that you are wrong, and I have used them in vain. So now I am going to use my final one ; which is the story of my own life, and the mistake which spoiled it."

"I shall be awfully interested to hear the story of your life ; but I cannot pretend that I think it will in any way alter the story of mine."

"Probably not ; nevertheless I want you to know how a man marred his life—and, what was far worse, a woman's—simply because he was such a blind fool that he could not understand her."

Jack puffed silently at his pipe, and the rector continued : "I was born at Teteigh, a village about two miles from Silverhampton, and the sweetest village in the whole world."

"I know it," said Jack shortly. Silverhampton was too redolent of memories of Ethel to be a pleasing subject of conversation to him just then.

"Then you know the nicest place on this earth, and the prettiest. Well, if you know Teteigh, you know the Old Hill there ; that steep hill up which the coaches had to crawl on all fours before the new road was cut right through the red sandstone some sixty years ago, but which is now too steep for vehicles. Do you remember it ?"

"As well as I remember my A B C."

"And you know a dear old house, built on so steep a slope

of the hill that upstairs is downstairs and downstairs is upstairs, as in De Quincey's *Dream of Jean Paul Richter*. The front-door has a reserved and dignified aspect, as all right-minded front-doors are bound to have which open right on the street with no gardens to chaperone them; but the back of the house belies its stern exterior, and is gay and bright and sunny, with tiers of grassy little terraces commanding a fine view of Silverhampton, which is a city set on a hill. And the terraces all come to an untimely end in a little wood, where you will find in the spring the bluest bluebells that are to be found in England. There are none bluer anywhere, and, to my mind, none half so sweet. That is the house where I was born."

"I have passed by it scores of times."

Philip Cartwright continued, speaking more to himself than to Jack: "At the top of the Old Hill there is another dear old house, but after a different fashion; a house which is surrounded by a high garden-wall, and so never has to be on its dignity; just as women, who have always been guarded and sheltered, are more gracious than those who are obliged to fight life's battles for themselves. This old house has a garden chock-full of sunshine; and when you open the green garden-door some of the sunshine overflows, and lies in a big splash right across Teteleigh High Street. I have often seen it happen."

"So have I."

"And there is an old sun-dial in the midst of the garden, to mark the sunny hours; and all the sunny hours of my life have been noted there; for that old house was once the home of Laura Greenfield, and Laura Greenfield is the only woman in this world or the next for me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jack: he understood that feeling.

"We loved each other as naughty children, and I trust that we shall love each other as spirits in heaven; but in the interval we misunderstood each other as man and

woman, and that is why my life is a failure and my house is left unto me desolate. I am going to tell you the story of this mistake, lest you yourself make a like one."

Jack looked obstinate, but the rector continued: "I loved her so much that it never occurred to me to keep telling her so, some facts seeming, to the obtuse masculine intelligence, to be too obvious for iteration. That is where I went wrong; and, too late, I found out what a blind fool I had been. But the comfort of learning that one has been a fool is a cold one."

"That is true, certainly."

"I had loved Laura ever since I was a small boy and she a smaller girl; and the aim and object of my life was to secure a stipend sufficiently large to be shared by her. For her I worked and hoped and waited; she was the central interest of my life—the other half of myself—my greatest help in the sacred work to which I had been called. I never undertook any duty without feeling how Laura's sympathy upheld me; I never heard any joke without wishing that Laura were there to laugh at it with me. It was my one object to keep from her everything that might grieve or worry her, for I could not bear to think of her as anything but happy; and so I carefully kept my own sorrows out of her sight, and for her sake tried to make light of my many and bitter disappointments. Even now I cannot conscientiously see that I ever failed in my love for, and my loyalty to, her. Yet all this availed me nothing, because I was so foolish as to imagine that silent adoration is enough for a woman, and that her worshippers need no liturgy."

"You must have cared for her a good deal," said Jack.

The rector smiled sadly. "Yes. I never lacked the inward spiritual grace, I believe; but with regard to the outward visible signs I lamentably fell short. And I have been well punished for my offence: it is a life sentence."

“Why, what happened?”

“Nothing; and it was in that nothingness that the tragedy of my life lay, and will continue to lie until Laura herself puts things straight again. For years I went on working and waiting and hoping. I was a poor curate in those days; but my heart was in my work, and I only regretted my poverty because it postponed my marriage with Laura. Otherwise I should have been perfectly content; for I am thankful to say that I am by nature one of those people to whom money, or the want of it, neither makes nor mars happiness. I am convinced that people are made differently in this respect, and that it is actually harder to be poor to some than to others.”

“I think the only difference is that some people are more worldly than others, and so are more keen on money and position and all that rot.”

Mr. Cartwright shook his head. “No, I don't believe it is worldliness altogether. I think that outside things are far more essential to some natures than to others, and that religion or the absence of it has nothing to do with the matter. For instance, I have an aunt who is a most godly and excellent woman; yet I do not believe she thinks it possible for anybody to be really happy who doesn't keep a man-servant. She does not look down on those unfortunate human beings whose doors are ordained to be opened by a parlour-maid; she is far too much of a lady for that; but, though she feels sure that God in His mercy will make it up to them in heaven, she sees no possibility of their ever tasting happiness on earth. Yet she is really a most religious person.”

“She must be very amusing, also.”

“She is unconsciously extremely so. She is deeply grieved with me because I do not see things in this same light; not angry with me, or even reproachful, but patiently



grieved. I remember once saying to her that I thought a large establishment an awful nuisance; and that—as it is difficult for a man to serve even two masters properly—I was thankful that I could not afford to keep more than two servants. She mourned over me just as if I had said that sickness was a pleasure or pain a delight.”

“Then was Miss Greenfield afraid of poverty?” asked Jack.

“Not a bit of it. She agreed with me that more money than you actually want becomes a burden, and takes all the pleasure out of life. All we desired was sufficient means to enable us to be always together. It didn’t seem much to ask, did it? but it was more than we received; yet other people get wealth and houses and lands in abundant measure. I feel sure that God will explain everything to us some day, and make it all plain; but I cannot deny that a great many of us will want—and will ask for—an explanation.”

There was a moment’s silence, which Jack did not like to break; and then Philip Cartwright added abruptly, in a voice not like his own, “She died, you know, worn out with waiting; and within a year of her death I became rector of a large London parish.”

“It was frightfully rough on you,” Jack said sympathetically.

“Yes, and on her too. I think that temporal success which comes too late is almost harder to bear than failure; but to succeed, ever so little, in helping and comforting one’s fellow-creatures, is the one kind of success that can never come too late.”

“I suppose it is. But did Miss Greenfield never know that you became one of the most popular preachers in town?”

The rector smiled. “Of course she knew; I have no doubt of that; but I cannot help wishing that she was still beside me to guide me with her counsel and to help me

with her sympathy. It seems to me one of the saddest things in life that so often when a man comes home rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him, those whom he wanted to rejoice with him are no longer there ; and so his harvest-home becomes a funeral feast, and his sheaves a burden too heavy to be borne."

"And I suppose," said Jack thoughtfully, "that even if those who are gone were to hear of our successes and disappointments, they would think them too trifling to be noticed ; and would wonder how we could make a fuss about such small things."

"Oh ! no, no ; I am certain that they would not ; I couldn't bear my life if I thought that Laura is so little the Laura that I used to know, that she no longer is interested in whatever interests me. Why, my dear Jack, has it never struck you that when One rose from the dead and appeared to His friends by the lake side, He did not talk theology to them, nor tell them how trifling all earthly matters now appeared to Him ? His first question was, 'Children, have ye any meat ?'—the most ordinary question of daily life. I always recall this when people try to convince me that those beyond the veil no longer take any interest in the commonplace affairs which interest us ; and I think what a comfort it is to know that those who have passed through the grave and gate of death are still too human and too natural and too intimate with us to be indifferent to any trifle which concerns our welfare, even in the smallest degree.

"I never thought of that before," said Jack.

"I am thinking of it always," the rector added. Then he went on : "But that is not the end of my story ; the part from which I want you to learn a lesson is yet to come. As I told you, Laura was the centre of my thoughts and the mainspring of my very life ; but because I was a man, and had therefore but slow perceptions, having told her once of this I saw no necessity for repeating the statement. I

thought she knew once and for ever that she was all the world to me, and that this was enough."

"I should have thought so, too."

"Ah! my dear Jack, you do not understand women, as you have already proved."

"Perhaps not; but I cannot for the life of me see why they should not be content to be treated as rational beings. If you like a man you don't keep telling him so, and why should you if you like a woman?"

Philip smiled. "I do not say that women are all-wise in that they require to be constantly assured of a man's love; I only say that such treatment is what they require. I do not uphold that rare orchids are all-wise in refusing to live in a cold temperature; but if you persist in keeping your greenhouse below fifty degrees, you must make up your mind to do without orchids. I am old enough to have learnt that in this world you must take things as they are, and not as you think they ought to be. But it was by no means an easy or an inexpensive lesson."

"It is beyond me altogether," said Jack.

The rector rose from his chair, and unlocked a drawer in his writing-table, out of which he took a volume bound in blue morocco, evidently a diary.

"I have never shown this to any one before," he said, and his voice shook; "but if we find that our tombstones may serve as other people's finger-posts, I do not think we have any right to keep them to ourselves. This little book is the tombstone which marks where all my hope and love and happiness lie buried; but if it proves of use to you in pointing out the way which leads to misunderstanding and misery, and so helping you to avoid it, I shall never regret having let you see it. Read the passages which I have marked, and learn from them how delicate and intricate a machine a woman's heart may be."

Jack took the little volume reverently into his own hands.

"Thank you," he said simply. "It makes me awfully proud to feel that you have given me such a proof of confidence and friendship. I need hardly tell you that whatever I learn here I shall regard as sacred; and even if it does not succeed in reconciling me to Elfrida Harland, it will always be a bond between you and me."

"I knew I could trust you, Jack, or I should never have dreamed of letting you into the secret places of my life in this way. Read only the marked passages: the rest is neither your business nor mine, but only Laura's."

"All right, I understand."

Jack opened the little book at the pages which Mr. Cartwright had turned down. It was a woman's diary, written in a pretty hand, and there was a faint scent of lavender between the leaves. The marked passages were at long intervals from each other, and had evidently been referred to over and over again, the book opened so easily at these places. They were as follows:—

*"3rd January.*

"I can't tell how it is, but I don't think that Philip is as fond of me as he used to be. It is ages since he has said anything nice, and I am sure if he really cared he would tell me so sometimes. I wonder if it is because he is getting tired of me, or only because he is cold by nature? I love him more than ever, he is so clever and handsome and good; but I do wish sometimes that he were a little more human and not so dreadfully superior. I sometimes think I will try to hurt him, just to see if he can really feel anything much; but that would be too horrid just now that he is looking so tired and working so dreadfully hard. And besides I love him so much that I should simply die of remorse if I succeeded in really making him unhappy, even for a minute."

*" 20th May.*

"The living of Pembruge, which we hoped that Philip would get, has been given to a stranger—some nasty old man from Manchester. I am bitterly disappointed, for I had made sure that Lord Silverhampton would give it to Philip, and he and I would have had such lovely times together. But it is my fate never to get what I want, and my feet are already sore with kicking against the pricks. I suppose I shall have to go on kicking, however, till I have one foot in the grave ; and then I shall go on kicking with the other, if I am still separated from Philip. I have cried, and cried, and cried over this Pembruge disappointment, till my eyes are half, and my nose is twice, their ordinary size. But what hurts me most is that Philip makes so light of it. He always does make light of his troubles when he is discussing them with me ; and I feel that that shows he does not really trust me.. I go to him with my heart simply bursting with sympathy, and with my whole soul longing to comfort him, and then he just puts me off with a bitter little joke, and all my passion of pity is wasted. If only he would tell me that he is unhappy, and would let me comfort him, I could bear our troubles a thousand times better ; but instead of that he persists in merely showing me the bright side of things, just as if I were a child or a plaything instead of the woman who loves him. It is so stupid of him not to see that I would far rather be in the shadow with him than in the sunshine all by myself. And it isn't real sunshine after all ; it is nasty, cold, spurious sunshine, like the sunshine that is reflected from the windows on the other side of the street."

*" 18th March.*

"It is still the old, old story : new hopes born only to be blighted, and each disappointment bitterer than the last, because as we grow older we lose our power of getting over

things and beginning again. I have had so many disappointments in my life that my mind feels as if it were covered with bruises. But it is Philip's attitude that makes things so hard to bear; I feel as if I almost hate him when he puts his troubles airily on one side, and then tries to amuse me by telling me all about what he has done and seen in London. Why can't he understand that I don't want to be amused and petted and played with, but to be allowed to help him to carry his burdens and to bear his griefs? He came down to Teteigh last week for a couple of days, and I had so looked forward to seeing him again, and showing him how absolutely I was one with him in everything that concerned him. But his visit was a disappointment, like everything else. He met me with a smile and a jest, and then treated me to a brilliant and amusing description of an entertainment which Lady Silverhampton had given down in the East End. As if I wanted to be entertained—and by him! Consequently I have cried myself to sleep every night since, and Philip has gone back to town, congratulating himself on his success in keeping me cheerful.”

“*29th November.*

“I have got a dreadful cold which will not get better. I don't think I should mind much if it never did, for my heart is broken by Philip's coldness; and the sooner my life is over, the better I shall be pleased. If only he had loved and trusted me as I love and trust him, how different everything would have been! After all, nothing can really separate us from each other but ourselves; and it is Philip's indifference, and not his poverty, that has come between him and me.”

“*15th March.*

“We are having the regular Silverhampton spring weather that I used to love—bright sun, sharp east wind, and the

roads looking like white stripes across the country. But for the first time in my life I shrink from the Silverhampton east wind ; it seems to blow through me as if I were made of paper. Philip and I are drifting further and further apart. He writes to me just as often as ever, but his letters are horrid dull ones, all about what he is doing instead of what he is feeling. What woman wants a Court Circular from the man she loves? But it is the old trouble—Philip has never thought me worthy to be admitted into the holiest places of his life. He has only let me come into the outer court and the banqueting-hall ; those, he thinks, are good enough for me, and are all that I am capable of understanding. If he had seen fit to open to me the doors of his heart's sanctuary and his hopes' dungeon, he would have found me not unworthy of his confidence ; I could have prayed and mourned with him as well as I have feasted and danced. But he has deliberately shut me out of his inner life, and I am powerless against his pitiless reserve."

*" 1st November.*

"The end is very near now. The summer has not done me the good that they hoped, and I cannot pull through another winter. But I do not feel sorry ; when one has had over ten years of loneliness and heartache, one has had about enough. I could have borne it all, and gladly, if only Philip had cared more for me, and had not so persistently shut the doors of his spirit in my face. But that doesn't matter now—nothing matters any more. My life has been an utter failure. I have given all my love and thoughts and the best part of myself to a man who has never regarded me as anything but a pleasant plaything and an agreeable pastime. But even now I would not take them back if I could. I would rather be a slave to Philip than a queen to any one else ; and though I have worshipped

an irresponsive idol, I have never known the shame of worshipping an unworthy one. So perhaps my life has not been such an utter failure as it might have been, after all."

That was the last entry in the little blue diary. Jack closed the book tenderly, and handed it back to the rector in silence. His eyes were dim with tears, but Philip's were dark with a dumb despair.

When the book had been restored to its hiding-place and the drawer locked up, Philip said: "I never saw her again after that. The end came suddenly at last, early in December. After she was dead they gave me, among other things, her diary; and then I found out, too late, what a blind fool I had been. I wanted her to have a good time, poor child! and so I tried to keep from her anything that might hurt her. But I made a mistake as you see, and a mistake which in this life I can never rectify."

There was a lump in Jack's throat. "Did she never know how you loved her?" he asked.

"Not here; but probably the angels have told her by now; and, if not, I mean to tell her myself some day, when we shall no longer see each other through a glass darkly, but face to face."



## CHAPTER XX.

### *ELFRIDA AT GREYSTONE.*

"New friends will meet me and will greet me kindly ;  
But shall I learn to love them half as well  
As thee, whom I have loved so long and blindly ?  
I cannot tell, sweetheart, I cannot tell."

**I**N spite of Sir Roger's arguments and Mr. Cartwright's experience, Jack Le Mesurier remained obdurate with regard to Elfrida. The wound she had inflicted on him was too recent for the healing process to have begun ; and until it did begin, forgiveness seemed impossible. Jack had trusted her blindly in the first instance—far more blindly than the majority of men would have done in similar circumstances ; and the very completeness of his confidence in her made it all the more difficult for him to pardon the deliberate betrayal of this trust. He would have found it even easier to forgive her had she deceived him in order to gain some great end ; but to feel that he had been befooled merely as a sort of joke, with no object but the satisfaction of a spoilt girl's whim, was more than he could patiently endure.

Elfrida wrote to him at some length, explaining that her sole object had been to prove the disinterestedness of his affection, and humbly beseeching his forgiveness. She told him how weary she was of the adulation of fortune-hunters, and how difficult it was for her to believe that any one loved her for her own sake and as her love for him had been

the reason for her offence, she trusted it might also prove the claim to his forgiveness.

Jack replied, by no means at great length, that he had trusted her with all his heart ; that she had deliberately and flippantly betrayed that trust just for her own amusement ; and that this, as far as he was concerned, was the end of the matter. There is no doubt that he was very hard and very obstinate ; but there is also no doubt that if one takes a watch to pieces to see how the works are made, calling the watch hard and obstinate will not make it go again. Elfrida had had her fling, and now the bill for it had come in ; and Fate is not one of those accommodating trades-people who reduce their accounts when we grumble at the size of them : possibly because she does not overcharge in the first instance.

Jack not only refused to be friends with Elfrida, but he would not even see her again. When she wrote begging him to call at her house in Mayfair, he replied shortly that his decision was unalterable, and that a meeting would be painful to both of them in the present circumstances ; and that therefore he was compelled, much to his regret, to decline her most kind invitation.

After that, she naturally could not press the matter further.

Elfrida fretted sadly over the results of her own folly. She had actually attained her heart's desire—she had found the blue rose, the magic ring, of her dreams—and, having found it, she had of her own free will thrown it away. She had no one but herself to thank for her misery ; but such self-earned gratitude is no alleviation of human woe, but rather an aggravation of it.

Sir Roger came up to London on purpose to see Miss Harland and talk over the matter with her, as far as so delicate a matter could be talked over ; and although he did not succeed in reconciling her and Jack, he formed a very

pleasant friendship with her on his own account—a not unusual perquisite of the peacemaker. Sir Roger and Elfrida had much in common; they were neither of them prone to think too well of their fellow-creatures, and they had both outlived (or thought they had) the majority of their illusions; and, greatest bond of all, they both cared for Jack more than for any one else on earth. Nevertheless, they could not make Jack do what they wanted; and that self-willed young man returned to India at the end of his leave, without even having seen Elfrida, much less forgiven her. Captain Le Mesurier had a will and a temper of his own.

Poor Elfrida shed many tears in secret over the barrier which Jack had erected between herself and him; but her tears did not serve to wash it away. She derived much comfort, however, from her friendship with Sir Roger, who was crowned in her eyes with the halo that is always worn by the relations of the beloved one—before marriage.

Soon after Jack rejoined his regiment, the Dower House at Greystone, which had been let for the last ten years, fell vacant; and Elfrida Harland immediately took it as her country residence, simply and solely because, if she lived near Sir Roger, she knew she would constantly be hearing news of Jack; which, after all, was no more foolish than taking a place for the sake of the hunting or the shooting or the fishing. It is never foolish to do a thing because we want to do it; the folly lies in doing a thing because other people think we ought to want to do it and we do not. "Because I like it" is the strongest reason in the world bar one; "because I ought to like it" is the feeblest; which is quite a different thing from "because I ought to do it," which is the strongest reason of all. Yet people frequently confound these two last, and confuse their own duty with another person's pleasure.

Sir Roger and his new tenant put their heads together to make the Dower House as pretty as possible. Elfrida

spared no pains or money in making the house attractive, because she felt sure that Jack would see it some day. Most of us in this world are playing to an audience of one; and that one's applause is the end and aim of the work we do and the things we say and the clothes we wear. When we cease to play to an audience of one, we either begin playing to the gallery as a whole, which is cheap; or we leave off playing altogether, which is old age and the end of all things. There is still a third possibility; namely to play to another one, which is really the only sensible thing to do. But Miss Harland's eyes had not as yet been opened to this third resource.

As Jack was no longer there, Elfrida found London intolerably empty—so empty, in fact, that no one but a hermit could choose it as a place of residence; so she left it early in the year, and took up her abode at Greystone Dower House with Arabella Seeley. In spite of her sorrow about Jack, that summer was not altogether an unhappy one to Elfrida Harland. She saw a great deal of Sir Roger Le Mesurier and of Philip Cartwright, two most interesting men in their way. Though they were neither the rose, they had both been near it; and though she would rather have had Jack, they were better than nothing. The word *instead* has no place in the vocabulary of some unfortunate persons; but Elfrida belonged to the happier half of mankind who do not exclude the expression from their daily walk and conversation. For which she ought to have returned thanks.

Moreover, Sir Roger and Mr. Cartwright were both clever, and Jack was not; therefore they suited Elfrida intellectually better than he had done; and although her heart was starved in Jack's absence, her mind thrived apace. To some women the fact that they have fallen in love with one man, makes it impossible for them to fall in love with any other; to another type of woman the falling in love with the one

awakens a side of their nature hitherto dormant, and so makes them all the more likely to fall in love again. Just as with some people a cold in the head ensures them from catching another for some time; whilst with others, each cold makes them more susceptible to the next. All of which is doubtless a matter of constitution and temperament, which doctors and lovers should carefully take into consideration, or else the former unfortunately will fail in curing their patients, and the latter (equally unfortunately) will succeed.

"Come and see my garden," said Mr. Cartwright one sunny morning, when he had come across Elfrida in the village; "I want your opinion on some new roses that have filled Clutterbuck's soul with delight. I call them ugly mongrels; but he considers them the acme of scientific achievement. I need hardly add that he budded them himself."

"I suppose 'a poor thing but my own' is Clutterbuck's motto," suggested Elfrida.

"Not it! Clutterbuck is wiser in his day and generation than Shakespeare was. Clutterbuck's motto is 'not a poor thing because mine own'—a most comfortable doctrine. People who consider all their own things perfection are very happy, don't you think?"

"Yes; I admire them profoundly, they are so wise. Sages such as these rejoice when the shoe pinches, because they say that shoes which are too big are far more uncomfortable than shoes which are too small. I always think that the fox, who decided that the grapes which were out of his reach were unfit for vulpine food, must have been a delightful person to live with, though perhaps annoying to a casual acquaintance. But in daily life give me self-satisfied people rather than grumbling ones!"

Mr. Cartwright acquiesced and Elfrida continued: "Self-satisfied people are always conceited, and I love conceited

people, they are so pleasant and easy and good-tempered. Conceit seems to me a most delightful and comfortable thing, like a fire in one's bedroom in the winter. I hate people who think badly of themselves; they are so touchy and suspicious, and are always expecting you to cut them or something."

Philip smiled. "Here we are at the rectory gates, and I can see Clutterbuck, like Love, among the roses. To tell you the truth, I do not care for fancy flowers; I prefer them as Nature made them; but you must never tell Clutterbuck this. It would cause him to despise me if he knew that I had no yearnings after blue narcissi and orange roses."

"I agree with you and not with Clutterbuck. But this scientific gardening is carried on now to such an extent that we shall soon have check geraniums and tartan carnations."

As the rector held the gate open for Miss Harland to pass through it, the two looked into each other's eyes and smiled; and this smile acted as a temporary anæsthetic to the pain in Elfrida's heart, which had never ceased aching since Jack's quarrel with her. It is wonderful what healing power lies in the smiles of some people; and they frequently happen to be people of a similar age and an opposite sex.

"I have brought Miss Harland to see your famous roses, Clutterbuck," said Mr. Cartwright. "She thinks it very clever of you to have invented a new sort."

Clutterbuck waved his spade in a deprecating manner. "It's all in the day's work, miss, to be sure, and no thanks to me; yet invention is better than cure, as they say."

"And if you have invented a new rose, it is but fair for you to have the credit of it," Elfrida remarked.

"Well, miss, we must all stand on our own laurels, as it were, and no man can hinder us from the defects of our

actions; and the wiser the actions the greater the defects; for nothing exceeds like excess, either in roses or sermons, as the rector himself can tell you," replied Clutterbuck, kindly including his master in the conversation.

"No one knows how to preach successful sermons better than he does," agreed Elfrida.

"You never spoke a truer word, miss, and you couldn't, even if you was to kiss the Bible on it. Aye, he's a wonderful preacher, our rector is!" And Clutterbuck looked at his spiritual pastor with pride and proprietorship. "When he preaches, it is like pouring water through a silver trumpet, that it is. I never heard the likes of it before, never, either for noise or teaching. Maybe you've heard his sermon on the dry bones, miss."

Elfrida shook her head. "I am sorry to say that I have not."

"Then your misfortune is greater than your fault, as they say, for a sweeter little sermon never was heard. As I say to my missis, 'Give me our rector on the dry bones, and I'll bear the palmistry before any other church or chapel!' Now there's our neighbour Higginson; he's an Independent, as you might say, and he sets great store by the Independent minister at Sugden, as is but natural; and he says there's nothing like their minister when he gets on to Jacob's ladder—it's something wonderful. But I say our rector can get more milk for babes out of them dry bones than is to be found in the whole of Sugden chapel; and what I says I sticks to, and always shall."

The rector laughed. "Miss Harland has just been propounding to me the beauty of conceit, and you are evidently bent on making me the illustration of her argument."

The gardener looked thoughtful. "Well, there are worse things than conceit, I daresay, provided we don't

get hold of the wrong things to be conceited about. But what I've no patience with are the folks that feel so much handsomer than they look, and give themselves airs accordingly."

"They are certainly aggravating," said the rector, catching Elfrida's eye.

"We all are as Providence made us, sir; and I make no doubt that if we'd the chance we'd a many of us send back our faces to be altered. But if we're born under the influence of Venus we're handsome, and if we're born under the influence of Saturn we're ugly, and what's the good of argufying against the planets?"

"You are very philosophical," remarked Elfrida.

"Well, miss, what I says is this: if we'd have had the making of ourselves we should all have been handsome; and if we'd had the making of one another we should all have been ugly; but Providence saw fit to arrange matters otherwise, and here we are, and it is all for the best. Though what induced Providence to give such a fine upstanding figure of a man to such a poor fool as my neighbour Higginson is what beats me."

"Is Higginson one of the conceited people?" Elfrida asked.

"Above a bit, miss, above a bit!" cried Clutterbuck with relish. "You've got hold of the right end of the nail this time, and no mistake. Conceit isn't the word for it. His head is fairly turned with looking at himself. But the trying part of the matter is that he is not so much proud of his good looks, which are plain for all the world to see, but of his knowledgeableness, of which he has less than a new-born babe, save such babies as are born idiots."

Elfrida nodded. "People are often more conceited about what they haven't got than about what they have."

"You never saw such fools as them Higginsons, never ;



## A Double Thread

and yet they think they know more than the world and his wife put together. Only the other day Farmer Larkinson came up to consult me about one of his cows that had fallen sick, and he couldn't quite diagram its symptoms; and of course Higginson must join in our conversation, and put his oar in our pie, as the saying is. Now my missis—having lived in an Archdeacon's family before her marriage—naturally knows all about cows; but Higginson must come and talk her down before she'd got a word in, and must give his opinion instead, which was not worth the breath that uttered it, let alone the time of them that had to listen to it. Oh! it is a sad and propitious sight to see folks so eaten up by conceit that they can't see for themselves that their neighbours know a sight better than they do."

"The only question being which are the people and which are the neighbours," added Mr. Cartwright.

"I may have my faults," continued Clutterbuck, as if there was room for considerable doubt on the subject, but he was making a generous concession to possibilities; "but I am grateful to Providence that conceit was never one of my besettlements. I know I never was much to look at, but that is no trial-by-jury to my patience, for I hold that a handsome man is first cousin-once-removed to a barber's block. Beauty's for the women, in my opinion—and they're a sight better without it, if you expect them to stop at home and overlook their own houses, instead of running all over the parish like a flock of feather-headed butterflies. But there's no one in the county that knows as much about roses as I do, and so it isn't in nature that I will stand being taught gardening by my neighbour Higginson, who knows as much about a garden as an egg knows of meat, and that is neck or nothing, as the saying is."

"Higginson seems a trial of the flesh to you," the rector said soothingly.

Clutterbuck sighed. "He'd be a trial to you, sir, I make bold to say, if you were so unfortunate as to live next door to him. You never saw his equality for ignorance. He and his wife must come a-preaching and a-teaching to me and Farmer Larkinson all about cows, of which they know absolutely nothing, no shame to them, but such being the case; and then when me and my missis, in the loving-kindness of our hearts, as you might say, take the trouble to give them a bit of friendly counsel about their pig, they ups in our faces and shuts our mouths with a deaf ear. Now, what can you do with such ignoramouses as that, I should like to know?"

Mr. Cartwright looked grave, though his eye twinkled. "You can do nothing, I should say, but let them severely alone; though that seems rather like cutting off one's nose to spite one's face, after all."

"Do you let people severely alone when they offend you?" Elfrida asked.

"Yes; but it is not a satisfactory mode of procedure as far as I am concerned, though I fancy my enemies rather enjoy it and feel that I am indeed returning good for evil. As a rule, when I am offended with people, and endeavour to show it, they either don't perceive it at all, or else they think I am not well, and send me grapes and flowers as to an invalid."

"That must be very horrid!"

"It is, extremely so. I shall never forget once being mortally offended with old Lady Silverhampton and showing it so well that she actually handed me her smelling-bottle right across a drawing-room. She said she was sure I felt faint, I was so unlike myself. I wasn't in the least faint; I was simply furious with the old woman herself, and was trying to interpret my righteous indignation by means of a stately and dignified exterior. But that smelling-bottle spoilt everything, and even put me under a sort

of obligation to my enemy, which crushed my spirit in the dust."

"All the same, I know you laughed."

"Of course I did; I simply roared. It seems to me that one can always laugh at things, unless one cries at them, and very often one can do both. But come and sit down under my cedar-tree where the lead-pencils grow. You look tired; or is it that you are offended, and I am misjudging you, as I have so often been misjudged?"

Elfrida smiled. "No, I'm not offended, and I'm not tired, only it is such a hot day that it will be nice to sit down and rest for a bit, and talk. But I don't think I could be offended with you, and I don't believe anybody ever was. You are so good-tempered and easy and outspoken, that to misunderstand you would be like playing hide-and-seek in a sunny garden with no corners?"

"Would it?" And the rector's smile was sad.

"Yes. Don't you know that one of the reasons why you are so nice is that you are so unreserved? I don't like reserved people, who never open the inner doors of their hearts to you, but make you sit down in the hall and wait till they are ready to speak to you, as if you were a tradesman calling for an order."

"Still one cannot give the same welcome to all one's friends and acquaintances," replied Philip, sitting down beside Elfrida on the old seat under the cedar-tree. "Some, as you say, have to be left in the hall; others are admitted into the reception-rooms, and there entertained; a few come down with us to the dungeons in the depths of our hearts, where our hopes were once starved to death and now lie buried; and fewer still ascend to our Holy of Holies, and pray and praise with us there. Then should you condemn us as reserved because we do not admit the public into these private sanctums?"

“Of course not ; it would be very cheap to let strangers into all our sacred places, and the opposite of reserve is not necessarily cheapness. But the difference between reserved and unreserved people is that the latter allow strangers to come into their hearts’ dining-rooms and drawing-rooms and libraries, while the former make casual visitors wait outside in the hall. And I don’t like waiting outside in halls ; I find it very chilly.”

The rector nodded. “Did you ever go into a house where there was an ordinary dining-room and drawing-room, as there are in scores of houses, and you walked into them at once and said to yourself, ‘I know exactly what this house is like, because it is exactly like every other house in the street’ ; and after a time you discovered a door leading out of the ordinary dining-room or drawing-room into some wonderful ballroom or concert-hall or picture-gallery, of which you had not dreamed when you entered the house, but which you found was the central idea of it, and showed the governing spirit of the whole place ? There are scores of houses like this, especially in London ; and I fancy there are scores of souls, too.”

“I know precisely what you mean about the houses. I have been inside heaps of them, and they are such pleasant surprises.”

“I am always on the look-out for annexes of this kind built on to human hearts,” continued Mr. Cartwright : “it is never safe to call anybody commonplace and uninteresting until you are quite sure that their souls have erected no out-buildings of this sort. The front of a man’s house is the house that he has inherited from his forefathers, or else it is constructed according to the style of architecture which happens to be in vogue ; but the annexe shows his own tastes and idiosyncrasies, and so is part of himself ; which things are an allegory.”

“Should you call a man reserved or the reverse who

threw open his ordinary reception-rooms to the public, and yet kept his annexe to himself, I wonder?"

"Ah! that is what I am coming to. The world would call him a nice, outspoken, cheery fellow, with no reserve about him; but I should say that your vestibule friends were open-hearted and gushing as compared with him. In their case, you know there must be a dining-room and drawing-room, though you are excluded from them; but in his case, having been made free of the reception-rooms, you have no idea there is anything else to see. Therefore his secret is infinitely better kept than theirs."

"You think that the really reserved people are those who appear to be the most unreserved. I wonder if you are right?" Elfrida said.

"Probably not; I very rarely am. Nevertheless, that is my opinion."

Elfrida idly watched the sunlight glinting through the dark boughs of the cedar-tree, and unconsciously was soothed by the droning hum in the air which is the *Te Deum* of the insect world. She was mentally very tired by all that she had gone through during the past year, and when one is mentally tired there is nothing so restful as an old-fashioned garden. Elfrida Harland was one of the women never intended by Nature to stand alone; yet Fate had willed that she should so stand; consequently her character had grown out of shape, like a young tree that is exposed to winds too strong for it. Perhaps there is no craving of the human heart so universal as the craving to be understood—not to be admired or praised or idealized, but merely to be comprehended. We take it for granted that the world in general will misapprehend our intentions and misinterpret our motives; but we all like to feel that there is one friend who can translate the story of our lives without a glossary, and who requires no interpreter when our souls hold converse together. If one person understands us thoroughly,

then the rest may blunder as much as they please, and we shall only laugh with that one at their mistakes; but if that one be lacking, then the drama of life is not worth the acting. A tragedy played before vacant stalls, comes perilously near to being a comedy; while a comedy with no applause save the echoes of an empty house, is tragic indeed. All her life Elfrida had been seeking for that audience of one, and as yet had never found him; for although Jack had loved her devotedly he had misjudged her. Consequently she was losing her interest in life, and her brilliancy at the same time; and she was gradually falling into that fatal error that nothing is worth while. To such women there comes a time when they cease to take the trouble to talk well or to utter smart sayings; then things are bad with them, but not hopelessly so. There is a further stage, when they cease to curl their fringes or to wear their best clothes; then things are so bad with them that they could not well be worse. Elfrida fortunately had not reached this second stage; for she had never looked lovelier than she looked that summer morning in the rectory garden, with a pensive expression upon her usually proud face. And so Philip Cartwright thought.

“Do you know, I have outlived all my illusions?” she said, suddenly turning to him.

“Oh! no, you have not; if you had, you would not say so.”

“Shouldn't I?”

“Certainly not. You may take it as an axiom that if any one voluntarily and gratuitously offers a piece of information, that piece of information is invariably incorrect.”

“There is something in that. No woman under thirty ever talks about her youth, and no man in Society ever tells you he is a gentleman. I think you are right; if people vouchsafe statements, it means that they don't believe them, but they hope that you will; just as when they assure

you that they will never do a certain thing, you may take it for granted that that is the one thing they will do."

"I should say, my dear Miss Harland, that the trouble is not that you have outlived your illusions, but that you have not."

Elfrida sighed. "I always get disappointed in people, somehow."

"Naturally; because you expect so much more from them than you are willing to give in return."

Miss Harland started; she was not accustomed to being scolded. Nevertheless, she bore it well; because it is a fact that while unattractive women dislike to be scolded, attractive ones generally enjoy it—given always that the man who scolds has not the slightest right to do so.

"I don't know. I am sure I could be awfully fond of people if only they would let me," she expostulated.

"There are, however, no 'ifs' in love," replied Mr. Cartwright.

"I am afraid I analyse my feelings too much," Elfrida mused.

"I think you do, as far as your own comfort is concerned; but you have a perfect right to do what you like with your own feelings. Where I quarrel with you is that you are too fond of analysing other people's; and that, I say, you have no right to do, as you do not and cannot know all the ingredients. You are like the Irish boy who was set to analyse a lump of coal, and only gave two-thirds of the component parts because he said he had only analysed two-thirds of the lump."

"Do you think that is my way?"

"Indeed I do. You always seem to me to be rushing about with a little figurative clinical thermometer, and taking people's moral temperatures, whether they will or no."

Elfrida laughed. "You misjudge my motives."

"I am not considering your motives at all; I am merely condemning your actions."

"But don't you see," said the girl, growing serious again, "that I do not analyse people's feeling out of mere curiosity, as so many women do? I am so hungry for love, and I have had so little of it in my life, and that not of a first-rate quality, that I want to be sure that I have got hold of the real thing before I stake my all upon it. You would never buy a diamond till you had examined and tested it, so why should you a heart?"

"Still I should not cut the diamond all away, to prove that it was a gem of the first water."

"But when I care for people at all, I care for them so much that I want to make sure they are worth caring for before I begin. Don't you know how disappointing it is to give of your very best, and then to find that your second-best would have done quite as well? It is dreadful to waste your finest brand of champagne on those who would really have preferred small beer!"

"Ah! you remind me of an excellent lady who told me that it was not her custom to have tea brought in every afternoon, as she regarded it as an extravagant habit; but that if I would like a cup, she would order some to be made at once. That was her idea of hospitality; and your idea of friendship seems to me on a par with it, if you will excuse my saying so."

"You are very hard on me!"

The rector looked amused. "Am I? Perhaps you deserve it."

"You see," persisted Elfrida, "that the more you care for a thing, the more important it is to you that the thing should be good of its kind. That is what I feel. If a house is going to be your home, you bother yourself about the aspect and the subsoil and the water-supply, in a way that you would never think of doing if you were



only a casual visitor. And it is the same with your nearest friends."

"My dear child, can you imagine Hagar—when she found the well of water in the wilderness—sending it on to the county analyst? And do you think that S. Peter wasted any time in psychical research when the angel appeared to lead him out of prison? No; there are some things too true for demonstration and too great for analysis; even in these days, when men would fain reduce love to a neurotic sensation and Christianity to an exact science."

Elfrida began digging little holes in the turf with the point of her parasol. "You disapproved of my conduct towards Jack Le Mesurier," she said abruptly.

"Most entirely."

"And you take his part in being so horrid about it, and refusing to forgive me?"

"On the contrary. I have yet to learn that the magnitude of a trespass is any excuse for the non-forgiveness of it."

"Then if you had been in Jack's place you would have forgiven me?" Elfrida persisted.

Philip was silent for a moment. "I don't know. All I know is that if I had been in Jack's place I ought to have forgiven you; which is not quite the same thing. But it was not altogether an easy thing to forgive."

"I couldn't make him understand that it was because I cared for him so much that I wanted to test him," said Elfrida hurriedly: "I knew that other men had only wanted to marry me for the sake of my money, and I did so long to find one man in the world who loved me for myself alone."

"I see; you could not make him understand that because other men were cads you naturally expected that he would be a cad too. It was stupid of him not to see that, wasn't it?—and still more stupid to be hurt by the suggestion?"

"I know I was horrid to him and that I have only myself to blame for all that has happened," said Elfrida humbly; "but still I think he might have forgiven me when he saw how sorry I was and how much I cared; don't you?"

"I not only thought so but I said so to him, over and over again. But, alas! it is so much easier to break than to mend, and to hurt than to heal. And you must always remember that it is the very intensity of Jack's love for you that makes it so difficult for him to forgive you. If he cared less, he could more easily pardon."

"I thought real love could forgive anything."

"I think it is in this way," replied Philip: "a small love forgives much; a great love forgives little; and a perfect love forgives all. But a perfect love takes long to grow, my child, and is never found in romance's earlier stages."

So the two friends sat and talked in the old rectory garden, and gradually the sunshine of the summer morning penetrated into Elfrida's soul. When we are young we very soon get tired of being unhappy, and snatch at any excuse for finding life pleasant again; and a man of the type of Philip Cartwright is by no means a poor excuse.

As for poor Jack out in India, he was just now very far from finding life pleasant—or anything else than thoroughly detestable; since the doggedness which made it impossible for him to forgive Elfrida, made it equally impossible for him to forget her, or even to love her any the less in spite of all his anger against her. Considering which peculiarity of Jack's disposition, it was a great mistake on the part of Jack's judgment to allow Elfrida the chance of forgetting him, even for a minute. If a man objects to the appointment of a rival in a woman's heart, he should not create a vacancy. But men are not always wise; or else how could women get on with them at all?

As a rule, if a man flies off at a tangent because some

particular woman has offended him, he expects—when his fury has abated—to find that woman sitting quietly waiting for him exactly where he left her. That she may have taken advantage of his excursion to indulge in a tangent on her own account, is a possibility which rarely presents itself to the masculine intellect; and the masculine intellect is accordingly shocked and surprised when such an unlooked-for and uncalled-for contingency arises. It is but common justice to mankind to add that should the case be reversed and the woman be the first to be offended, she may usually count upon the man's allowing the same tolerance that he expects; and she may safely depend upon finding him—when her rage has exhausted itself—at the precise point in their mutual friendship where they parted. But, of course, when a man begins to reason that because he is a reasonable being a woman is a reasonable being also, he merely proves that his alleged reasonableness is an empty boast; which, as Euclid would say, is absurd.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *SIR ROGER.*

“ Shall we find, above the sphere  
Of our woes,  
All the moons we cried for here?—  
No one knows.”

**D**URING that first summer of Elfrida's life at Greystone, Sir Roger Le Mesurier wrote a book; a cheery, gossiping, delightful book of reminiscences, full of that spicy wit and vicarious unreserve whereby an author is so successful in fascinating his readers and estranging his friends. Sir Roger had been everywhere and known everybody in his time; consequently he had tales to tell which were as marrow and fatness to all such dwellers in outer darkness as are not mentioned in the pages of Sir Bernard Burke. “Society with an aspirate” (as an excellent old lady used to refer to the capital S) did not altogether approve of Sir Roger's book, yet read it all the more diligently on this account; but that Greater Britain, which lies outside the Red Book, fairly revelled in the volume, and perused it with that engrossing interest which all healthy and right-minded persons take in the goings-out and the comings-in of their social superiors. Dear, normal, fallen human nature finds it difficult to realize—even in imagination—a heaven wherein the angels are not consumed by a laudable and absorbing curiosity as to the domestic arrangements of the archangels. And, at the bottom of our com-

fortable, English, evil hearts, we should none of us feel any the less at home with them if they were.

The book had a great run; and—which was more important to the author—it made a great deal of money. Sir Roger was very keen on making money just then.

“I wonder,” Elfrida said to him one autumn day, as they were strolling together through the gardens at Greystone, “that you never wrote a book before, now that I see how awfully well you can do it. If you can do it now, you could have done it years ago.”

“Precisely: that probably is the reason why I did not. Have you never noticed that, as a rule, books are not written by the people who can write them, but by the people who cannot?”

Elfrida was silent for a minute. “I wonder what made you begin now,” she repeated.

“Do you? I should have thought you would have been clever enough to find that out, and to laugh at me accordingly. Why, I have been laughing all my life at people who put themselves out for the sake of other people; it seemed to me such an idiotic thing to do: and yet I have become such a fool in my old age that I am actually wasting the last years of my life in work, so that I may leave Greystone to Jack with enough money to keep it up. Did you ever come across such a piece of arrant folly?”

Elfrida laid her hand caressingly on the old man's arm. “I think it is awfully nice of you to do it!”

“I cannot see that myself. I am doing what I want to do, and there is no special virtue in that. The point of the joke lies in my wanting anything so absurd as to secure the happiness of a young ass with whose prejudices I have not common patience.”

“You see you are a lot better than you pretend to be; and though you jeer at Jack's hyper-conscientiousness, it nevertheless appeals to you.”

Sir Roger laughed his piping little laugh. "My dear child, what an absurd notion! I am no better than I pretend to be, goodness knows! I am not doing this because Jack's conscientiousness now appeals to me, but because the beauty of Jack's mother appealed to me thirty years ago. Don't indulge in illusions, Elfrida: they smell of bread-and-butter; and the smell of bread-and-butter is repulsive to the adult masculine nose."

"Probably when you have made the money, Jack will throw it away on account of some absurd scruple," said Elfrida bitterly.

"I shouldn't be surprised; it would be most characteristic of him," replied Sir Roger.

"The worst of Jack is that he doesn't care enough about what he does care about."

"Pardon me, my dear young lady; that is where you make a mistake. He cares so much that he is ashamed of showing how much he cares. If he cared less he would show it more."

Elfrida sighed: in spite of her growing interest in Philip Cartwright, her old love for Jack was still subject to severe relapses. "I wish he had cared less for his conscience and more for me," she said.

"Pooh! my dear, it wasn't his conscience at all that came between you. He thought it was; but it was really his pride. And now he is too proud to let you know how dreadfully he wants you. Jack always was a fool; and never more so than when he threw up Greystone for the sake of a deceitful little minx like you." And Sir Roger patted the girl's shoulder indulgently.

"I don't believe he wants me now."

"Don't you? Then I know him better than you do. But it is a great mistake ever to let your pride come between you and the thing you want. I fail to see the sense of pretending that you don't care about an object which you are

really longing for : yet scores of men do it, whereof our dear Jack is not the least. And scores of women, too."

"I suppose it is a sort of shyness."

"A sort of shyness, Elfrida? It is rather a sort of madness. Why, I have known men lose many things—from the representation of a constituency down to the love of a woman—through pretending they didn't want them when they did. If you want anything out of people, always give them to understand that the boon which they have it in their power to bestow is the most desirable blessing on the face of the earth. It tickles their vanity, you see; and vanity, like charity, is a virtue which never fails."

"Then if we were wise we should rather overpraise than underpraise the thing which we covet."

"Certainly. For what we are going to receive, we should always be truly thankful: with regard to what we have already received, we can afford to exercise our own judgment, and to speak truth with our neighbours."

Elfrida followed the train of her own thoughts as she and Sir Roger sat down in an arbour cut out of the old yew hedge. The master of Greystone was much feebler than he used to be, and could not now walk for any distance without sitting down to rest. Then she said: "Mr. Cartwright and I have been wondering whether you are really pleased about the success of your book. I was surprised that he didn't know exactly what you felt about it; but he said that he had no more idea about it than I had, you were so difficult to understand."

Sir Roger looked up sharply. "Why should you be surprised?"

"I thought you and he knew each other so well that you would be sure to confide in each other."

"But, my dear, that is usually the reason why people do not confide in each other. As a rule, the more intimately we know our friends the less we confide in them."

Elfrida shook her pretty head. "You don't mean that a bit, really: all that nastiness of yours is put on. But I want to know if you are pleased about your book. Mr. Cartwright says he should be delighted if he had written a book that was such a brilliant success."

"Ah! Cartwright has a grateful heart. I have noticed that he invariably returns thanks after a bad dinner, and holds harvest festivals when there is a scarcity in wheat."

"But are you pleased at the success of your book?" Elfrida persisted.

"No; I am not pleased. Why should I be? Fame is not a thing that appeals to me. I have never got what I wanted in all my life, and I don't care to be chalked off with something that I do not want. I feel like a child who cries in vain for a rocking-horse, and then is consoled by its fond mother with an acid-drop. I always pity the poor little beggars who cannot get the toys they ask for, and yet are expected to be grateful and contented because their parents have given them something entirely different. I know exactly how they feel."

"I suppose we all of us cry for the moon at some time or another," said Elfrida softly.

"But, my dear, I didn't cry for the moon: that is what I am complaining of. I cried for a fireside of my own, such as other men have; and Providence gave me the moon instead."

During that winter Sir Roger failed visibly; almost each day found him perceptibly weaker than the last; yet he managed to write a second book of reminiscences which proved even a greater success than his first one, and brought in a considerably larger sum of money.

"It is no good," he said to Elfrida in the early spring: "I shall never live long enough to make a fortune for Jack. It is an interesting example of the elementary education provided for our souls by Providence, that the moment I



try to make my life of use to any one but my wretched self, it is cut off. Providence certainly has strange views with regard to elementary education. I have often remarked upon it."

"So have I."

"Apparently if there is one thing the possession of which would make us into good men and women, that thing is denied us; and then we are punished for not being the good men and women which it was impossible for us to become without it. I am not finding fault; I am only saying that it seems peculiar."

"I wonder if Mr. Cartwright could explain it," said Elfrida.

"I feel sure that he could; and also that his explanation would be eminently unsatisfactory. Our dear friend Cartwright is an admirable man, but he is a little too fond of explaining things. If you find his explanations conclusive, accept them by all means; I do not."

"But all the things that perplex us will be explained one day, don't you think?" asked Elfrida timidly.

Sir Roger smiled. "Possibly; but not by Cartwright."

After a pause he went on: "You see, as far as I can make out, most of your troubles and Cartwright's and Jack's were in the first instance your own fault. Now there is some satisfaction in that."

"Oh! I don't agree with you. I think troubles for which we have ourselves to thank are the hardest to bear of all."

Sir Roger shook his head. "No: if a thing is your own doing, you feel you are bound to bear quietly the consequences of it, if you have any pluck in you. If you have had the goods, you mustn't grumble at paying the bill for them. What I object to is paying the bill for goods I have never had. That is a most unremunerative form of expenditure."

"But it is so much more comfortable to pity oneself than to blame oneself, don't you think?"

"Neither would amuse me, because I never blame nor pity anybody. I have plenty of Christian charity, and it is of the lowest temperature. If I had had my chance and missed it, I would have borne cheerfully the consequences of my own folly, feeling that they served me right; but I have never had my chance."

"Still you seem to me to have had a lot of good things," argued Elfrida; "brains and rank and money are not unimportant drugs in the making up of life's prescription."

"My dear, you have never been a man too feeble for men to fear and too grotesque for women to love. Who would realize that *King Lear* was a tragedy if it were bound in the cover of *Comic Cuts*? And who would refrain from laughing at Hamlet if he were made up as Punchinello?"

Elfrida did not speak, but she stroked Sir Roger's hand. After a moment's silence he added with an amused smile: "It is funny of me to be telling you all this; but I think I could always have told a woman anything, only no woman ever had the patience to listen to me. Yet if I had been six foot high, instead of five, the dear creatures would have mourned over the spoiling of my dinner, and wept at the breakage of my finger-nail."

"I am sure, dear Sir Roger, that you exaggerate the importance of appearance."

"Perhaps so. We are inclined to think that the people who are dying of starvation exaggerate the importance of bread. Bread does not make us happy; then why should the absence of it render them so extremely the reverse? As I have told you before, if you want to know how much a thing is worth, ask the people who have not got it; if you want to know how little it is worth, ask the people who have."

"Still I cannot think that mere size is of so much

importance as you do," said Elfrida wisely, having fallen in love herself with a man that stood six-foot-two in his stockings; "the greatest men have often been the smallest."

"My dear Elfrida, I know that you can carve Miltons out of cherry-stones; but they will be 'mute inglorious Miltons' at best. As it happens, strength and beauty are the two things that I think worth having, and they are the two things that Providence most markedly denied me. I should therefore be a humbug if I went about 'thanking the goodness and the grace' which has made me, of all types of men, the one I most particularly dislike and despise. Do you think I don't know that if I had been as big and as handsome as my brother, Jack's mother would have loved me quite as well? And do you think I don't know that I loved her a thousand times better than he was capable of loving any woman? But she mistook my tragedy for burlesque because I was such a wretched little apology for a man."

"I don't wonder you feel bitter if you think that," said Elfrida, in a soothing voice.

"I have been bitter enough, heaven knows! But now all the bitterness has evaporated, or else I could not talk about it. When one has nearly done with a thing, one ceases to mind it much one way or another, you know; and I should as soon think of abusing my feeble little body now, as I should think of scolding a cook who was leaving. Many a time," continued the old man, laughing softly, "have I made up scathing sentences and scorching anathemas, while I was eating a vilely cooked dinner, ready to hurl at the head of the priestess of the kitchen ere she took her flight; but when the time came for her actually to depart, I was content to pay her her wages and let her go in peace, thankful to feel that I had seen the last of her. And that is how I feel about this miserable little body of mine. I have hated and cursed it with all my heart in the old days, and shall be

thankful to be rid of it ; but now that it and I must part company, we may as well part friends."

In spite of Sir Roger's failing health and Jack's continued estrangement, that winter had not been altogether an unhappy one to Elfrida. She would have said that it had been wretched ; but we are not very miserable, as we are not very happy, when we "can say how much" ; and Miss Harland could have published a temperature-chart of her unhappiness at that particular time, so completely had she her symptoms at her finger-ends. All this time Philip Cartwright had never said a word of love to the girl, or shown her anything save the warmest friendship ; but Love and Friendship are sisters so much alike that it is not always easy to tell the difference between them, especially when they are similarly dressed. Sometimes even they are not quite sure themselves which is which.

Elfrida had now been at Greystone Dower House for a whole year ; and during that time there had rarely been a day when she and Philip had not met at least once. Therefore he was fast becoming a habit to her ; and the man who becomes a habit to any woman, has an enormous score in his favour as far as she is concerned, even though she may not know it. Moreover, Philip had come into her life exactly at the point when Jack had created such a gaping hole therein ; and she had unconsciously endowed Mr. Cartwright with some of her former lover's cast-off attributes. She argued that because Jack had trusted her all through the scare about the pink diamond, Philip would have trusted her also, since men are so much alike ; and that because Jack had refused to pardon her duplicity, Philip would have forgiven it freely, since men are so entirely different. Peculiar reasoning, perhaps, but essentially feminine.

Sir Roger grew rapidly worse when the east wind set in fiercely, as it has a way of doing in the early spring. He

was now confined to his room, and there Elfrida went to see him every day, like the most devoted daughter. She had first loved him for Jack's sake ; now she had learnt to love him for his own. It fretted him dreadfully that he could not continue his literary career and so make sufficient money to enable Jack to keep up Greystone properly. He had decided to leave the place with the title, and as much money as he could scrape together ; but he was sorely afraid that Jack would be compelled to let the house, or else shut up half of it and live in the other half.

"My dear," he said to Elfrida one afternoon as she came in and sat down by his sofa, "Cartwright has been talking so very prettily and properly to me about angels, and matters of that kind. But the provoking thing is that I don't care at all about seeing angels ; I never took the slightest interest in angels : they always seem to me to be nothing but glorified maiden-aunts. For my part, I had much rather see Jack's mother."

"I expect you will see her, too."

"Perhaps so ; and then for the first time in my life I shall be able to talk to her without feeling that she is laughing at me for being so small. Hang it all, Elfrida ! how can a man talk properly to a woman in this world, or in any other, when she is half a head taller than he is ? The thing can't be done."

"What made you love her so ?" asked Elfrida.

"Good gracious, child, what a question ! Though I was fool enough to fall in love, I never was fool enough to try to find a reason for it. The fool who recognizes his folly as folly is wise ; but the wise man who mistakes his folly for wisdom is a fool."

"But if you love a person very much you must know why you love them," persisted the girl, who never indulged in any feeling herself without finding a reason for it.

"Indeed ; you astonish me. Now my experience is that

people never really love one another unless there is every reason why they should not ; but of course my experience may have misled me."

Elfrida shook her head ; she prided herself upon her wisdom just now, because she felt she was behaving so very sensibly about Jack Le Mesurier. So she was ; but it was Mr. Cartwright's wit, rather than her wisdom, which was responsible for her patient endurance of her present affliction. "There must be a reason, even if one is unconscious of it," she said didactically.

"The only reason I could ever find for a man's falling in love was that he had nothing else to do ; that is a good enough reason, I admit, and very often the true one. But that does not explain why one woman should weigh down the scale against the rest of her sex put together, when few women are under nine stone, and none confess to being over eight. Don't be sensible, Elfrida ; it is a nasty habit, and grows upon one ; and it is especially objectionable in a woman. Men never propose to sensible women ; because they know that if they do they will be accepted."

"I hate fools," replied Elfrida shortly.

"So do I, my dear ; no one more. But your sensible woman is a fool of the finest water, or else she would never let it be found out how sensible she is."

"But you like sensible men ?"

"I cannot say ; I never met one."

"Well, I call you very sensible," Elfrida persisted.

"Oh ! my dear, my dear, what are you coming to ? Call a man sensible who has loved a woman and written a book ! What will you say next ?"

"You only did what you knew you could do, and I call that being sensible."

Sir Roger laughed softly. "The sensible thing is to know you can do something, and yet not to do it ; but few people are as sensible as that, I regret to say."

Elfrida still demurred. "I am glad they are not. Nevertheless I must confess that I do not like people who don't know their own limitations."

"In that case your circle of friends must have marked limitations indeed."

There was a minute's silence, while Sir Roger's eyes wandered over the familiar fields through which he was never to walk again. Then he said: "By the way, I have received a letter this morning which has raised a doubt in my mind as to the justice of our comments the other day anent the ideas of Providence regarding elementary education. Old Miss Camilla Desmond has died, and the whole of her fortune—no inconsiderable one—comes to Jack; so now I can leave Greystone to him in peace, knowing that he will be able to keep up the place properly."

"Oh! I am very glad. It will mean everything to Jack."

"It is so like Providence," said Sir Roger, "to make me begin working for the first time in my life for another person, and then to step in and show me how easily the thing can be accomplished without my interference. Still I am not sure that, from an educational point of view, this course of treatment is such a mistake after all."

"It keeps us humble, you mean."

"No; I should have meant that a year ago, but I do not now. What I mean is, it teaches us that the Divinity which shapes our ends is not entirely the automatic and bungling apparatus that we, in ordinary life, suppose it to be. Most of us regard Providence as a sort of million-horse-power steam-engine, which we guide by means of a piston called prayer; but which, unguided by us, would run off the lines altogether. I don't mean to say that we consciously believe this; but we believe it practically all the same."

Elfrida laughed. "I think we do, and we try to oil the wheels of the steam-engine by self-denials and penances and things of that kind."

“Precisely ; and we go without the things we do not much care about, in order to get the things that we do. This is a plan which recommends itself strongly to most people, and is supposed to completely take in Providence and ensure to us what we like. But we must never say out loud that we like it, or else Providence may overhear and take it from us. We must also never say out loud that we are well or happy, lest Providence should overhear, and make us ill or wretched instead. It is very funny, but it is also very true.”

“Perfectly true ; scores of really religious people are like this.”

“They never seem to realize,” said Sir Roger dreamily, “that the wish for a thing is nine times out of ten the proof that such a thing is necessary to us ; and the proof that a thing is necessary to us, is a guarantee for getting it some day ; otherwise why should we have been created with the desire for it ?”

“But do you think that eventually we shall all be what we might have been ?”

“I presume so. Perfect wisdom must include common sense. What engineer would trouble to construct an aqueduct where there was no water, or lay down a set of rails which led to nowhere ? And I cannot believe that the Almighty is less wise than a civil engineer. I admit that while the aqueduct is being built there is no water, and that while the rails are being laid down there are no locomotives running up and down ; but that does not prove that there never will be.”

“You mean that ‘spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues,’” replied Elfrida softly.

“My dear girl, at all costs avoid the besetment of trite quotation. Inverted commas are as unfeminine as clay pipes, and form the first step in that downward career which finally lands a woman in a reputation for intelligence.”



"But I thought you liked clever women."

"So I do, provided they are clever enough not to be intelligent. But an intelligent woman is a thing that my soul abhors; she is almost as bad as a sweet woman, and nothing could be worse."

"Your views of life have changed a good deal lately," remarked Elfrida after a pause.

"Naturally, my child. Have you never stayed with people whom you detested, and yet felt quite fond of them on the last day of your visit because it was the last? Have you never found the most wearisome journey cease to be wearisome when the whistle had sounded for the last station? Nothing is unbearable when the end of it is in view."

"I know that. I believe one reason why the National Anthem is such a popular melody is because it shows that entertainments are concluded."

"I have no doubt of it; and now that the orchestra is tuning up for my National Anthem, I am tempted to think that life's entertainment has not been such a dreary affair after all; yet while it was in full swing I considered it insufferable."

"Are you tired of it?"

"Well, it is in this way. I have been fighting against God all my life, and the battle has lasted till the going down of the sun; but a gentleman knows when he is beaten in fair fight, and feels no animosity when he lays down his arms. I have fought, and been beaten, and am laying down my arms."

Elfrida looked into the bright eyes, which still showed the indomitable spirit enclosed in the feeble frame. "You have been fighting against Man all your life, too," she said, "and Man has never beaten you."

"Never. Yet Man always despised me for being little, and I don't think God ever did, and that is where the sting

lay in my dealings with Man. Perhaps there is nothing so bitter in life as the contempt of one's moral and intellectual inferiors on account of some trifling personal or pecuniary disadvantage. No man can drink of this cup without feeling the acid eat into his very soul ; I have drained it to the dregs, and yet people are surprised that I do not overflow with the milk of human kindness."

"And now you are not afraid?" asked Elfrida, her eyes filling with tears.

Sir Roger shook his head. "No ; why should I be? Man never did me justice, but I think God will ; Man never showed me mercy, but I hope God will ; and, at any rate, I shall cease to be measured by my wretched little body. There is nothing like the bitterness of life for taking the bitterness out of death."

"I wonder if all the wrongness and crookedness will be made straight at last."

"I don't know, but I fancy so. What strikes me most now is how few things really mattered. I cannot imagine why I minded them so much ; it was absurd ! I have not Cartwright's happy knack of finding solutions to all life's problems, as if they were a set of hooks and eyes," Sir Roger continued, with his whimsical smile, "but I feel that everything will probably come right somehow, if we will only wait, and not be in such a hurry to look at the answers. There is plenty of time between now and the other end of eternity, if we could only realize it ; so we need not be so terribly upset, even if the answers are not published in the current number."

There was a long silence, while the room grew darker and darker. Out of doors the trees loomed big through the purple twilight, like dusky giants waving their long arms in farewell ; and the river gleamed silvery white in the fading daylight, as if it were a stream of living water which no darkness could ever touch. Even though the night was coming,

there was the breath of spring in the air ; and the sunset had left behind it a rosy glow which promised a brighter sunrise. Above the tops of the black fir-trees the stars fluttered in the pale green sky, like a flock of homing doves on their way to the golden land beyond the sunset. It was one of those evenings which seem more like the preparation for to-morrow than the conclusion of to-day ; and for a to-morrow which shall be as to-day, only much more abundant.

Suddenly the darkness and the silence grew oppressive, and Elfrida woke up from her dreams with a shiver.

“ How dark it is ! ” she exclaimed, rising from her chair and going towards the bell. “ I will ring for a light.”

But there was no need to ring for a light, as far as Sir Roger was concerned : to him the light had already come.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### *JACK'S RETURN.*

"You had no thought of being cruel—  
To you, I know, my love was dear ;  
But would you keep a precious jewel  
Unwatched while thieves were prowling near ?  
Or would you leave a golden lily  
To grow unguarded on the lea ?  
If love be priceless, it was silly  
To make so very sure of me."

**I**N spite of the advantages which accrued to him thereby, Jack Le Mesurier was sincerely grieved to hear that he had lost two such true friends as Sir Roger and Miss Camilla. But, fortunately for us poor mortals, there are only a few people in the life of each of us whose going-away leaves a blank which can never be filled up again—otherwise our lives would not be worth living ; and neither his great-aunt nor his uncle had assumed this important position in the life of Jack Le Mesurier. So, though he mourned sincerely, he was speedily comforted.

There was, however, one person who had the power to create by her absence such a vacuum in Jack's existence as could not be filled by anything or anybody else in the whole world ; and this person had, through her own folly and Jack's, created this vacuum ; consequently Jack's life for the last year or so had been very miserable indeed. He had not tried to forget Elfrida ; men never try to do what they know to be impossible, and Jack was perfectly

aware that Miss Harland had written her name in indelible ink upon his heart. He had tried to convince himself that she was not worthy of his love, and that it was folly to fret after so deceitful a woman; but convincing ourselves that we ought not, as a race, to be dentally inferior to our forefathers, is a poor cure for the toothache. And after a time Jack left off endeavouring to get on without Elfrida, and began instead to devise plans as to how he could get on with her instead. Though his affection did not cool, his anger did; and he yearned for some means whereby things might be put straight again between himself and her.

Of course he did not let the fire of his anger die out without some praiseworthy efforts on his part to stir it and poke it and keep it alive. What self-respecting man would? But if Love and Pride are at war with each other, Memory has a trick of taking sides with the former, and recalling attractive little traits and touching little incidents which have nothing to do with the matter in hand, and which would be much better forgotten altogether. But when Memory holds a brief for Love, he knows better than to let such things slip; and he takes us unawares, when we have forgotten for the moment how angry we are and how angry we ought to be, and knocks us down with the bitter-sweet fragrance of what has been once but can never be again until we put our selfish dignity out of court altogether. And if Pride wins his case after that, then Love was not Love at all, but merely Vanity dressed up in Love's garments—an incognito under which Vanity is very fond of travelling, and which deceives many who have never seen Love himself face to face. But those who have once met Love, and looked into his eyes, know that he is stronger even than Death, and therefore ten thousand times stronger than Pride; since these are at best but mortal, whilst Love has already put on immortality. And they also know that Vanity dressed up in Love's garments is about as much

like Love himself as a farthing rushlight is like the morning star.

Jack Le Mesurier knew what he knew, and knew also what he did not know—two branches of knowledge rarely mastered by cleverer men; and he fully understood that it was as impossible to him to live without Elfrida as it was to understand her, and that therefore to attempt either of these impossibilities was an act of folly. He arrived at this state of mind when he had been nursing his anger out in India for a little over a year, and it had finally died in spite of all his care; and when his accession to rank and fortune came soon afterwards, he felt that the time had arrived for him to return to Elfrida and graciously pardon her. That she would no longer be anxious to be pardoned was a contingency that never presented itself to his imagination. If we find a particular person necessary to our happiness, it is difficult—even to the most complex among us—to believe that we do not form an equally important ingredient in that person's scheme of existence; and Jack Le Mesurier was by no means complex.

At first he decidedly enjoyed being made much of and Sir Johnned; but he grew accustomed to it with that fatal rapidity wherewith human nature gets accustomed to anything in the shape of glory and honour. It is only unhappiness that seems strange to us for any length of time; three weeks is the utmost limit for nice things to appear as novelties; which proves that happiness is our normal state, and that we were originally designed for crowns and not for crosses.

In the middle of the transformation scene when spring was turning into summer, the new baronet arrived at Greystone. It was with a glow of intense pleasure that Jack realized he was reigning where his fathers had reigned; and he experienced an equal, if not a greater, joy in the consciousness that he was about to extend his

sceptre to, and share his throne with, the woman whom he delighted to honour. Jack was extremely primitive and excessively English—two most excellent things in man.

But the woman whom he delighted to honour was, on the contrary, extremely subtle; and she had read, between the lines of Jack's recent letters to his uncle, the whole story of the last illness and death of that fierce anger of his against her. She was as conscious of Jack's desire to forgive her as she was of her own indifference to this tardy forgiveness; and although she thought she no longer wished to marry him, she knew she still wanted him to wish to marry her.

Therefore she arranged to be away from home when Jack arrived at Greystone in all the panoply of his freshly-acquired dignity.

The disappointment of the new baronet on calling at the Dower House and finding it empty, quite came up to Miss Harland's expectations. He felt that sudden chill, which most of us have experienced at some horrid time or other, when the event to which we have eagerly looked forward turns out to be an utter failure. Disappointment is one of the nastiest things in life, because it always comes on the top of pleasurable anticipations; just as a cold that we catch when we are warm, does us ten times more harm than a long continuance in a freezing atmosphere. It is sudden falls of temperature that chill our bodies and our souls to death.

Jack had looked forward with passionate eagerness to seeing Elfrida again. He had frequently rehearsed his return to Greystone in his own mind; and the rehearsal was always animated by the expectation of Miss Harland as audience. Consequently when the actual play was performed, and there was no Miss Harland to witness it, it fell very flat indeed—at any rate to the principal performer.

Elfrida would have been delighted had she known how her absence took the gilt off the gingerbread of Jack's

arrival. She imagined that she was indifferent to him; but here she was mistaken. A woman is never indifferent to a man as long as she derives pleasure from his pain; it is when she is sincerely sorry to have hurt his feelings, that her indifference is an indisputable fact. Yet men have a weird and grotesque way of reasoning that if a woman really cares for them she will not say nasty things; while all the time it is because she does care, that the nasty things are said. A man positively plumes himself when the girl who has said nasty things to him begins to say nice ones; yet, if he were wise, he would discover the other man to whom she has begun to say the nasty things, and he would deal with that man as seemed best to him. Considering that Woman has walked this earth for some six thousand years at least, and Man for some years longer, it is strange that he has not picked up a few little things like this.

Finding Greystone so particularly uninteresting, Jack repaired to Silverhampton, and stayed for a few days at the Deanery, settling Miss Camilla's affairs. And while he was there he walked by himself through the lanes where he had walked with Elfrida that happy summer, two years ago, when he believed her to be the beautiful beggar-maid to whom he was prepared to play King Cophetua. After all, there was something to be said for Jack; it is irritating to a man to study the part of Cophetua and be ready to perform it to the letter, and then to find that the play has been changed, and the part of Bassanio allotted to him instead.

But by this time Jack had forgotten to be angry—had forgotten everything indeed save the fact that he could not live any longer in a world depopulated of Elfrida Harland; and the lanes where he and she had walked together became a veritable fairyland in Jack's eyes, wherein trespassers ought to have been prosecuted. And they looked like



fairyland just then, even to eyes less enlightened than Jack's; for the bluebells were out, and the woods were paved as with a sapphire-stone; and the hedges on either side of the roads were white with may-blossom, and looked like wave-built, foam-crowned walls, guarding—as of old—a heaven-made pathway from winter's house of bondage into summer's promised land.

Jack walked in all the places where he had walked with Elfrida—or, rather, with Ethel, for she had been Ethel to him then—and he tried to recall exactly what she had said and how she had looked at each particular spot. He remembered how she had said that the blue hills to be seen from King's Square were like the Delectable Mountains; and how interested she had been in the monument at Teteigh of the woman who sewed on Sunday; and how she had laughed at him, and told him he was growing old, because once he had complained of the steepness of the road up the Holloway; and, in short, he recalled all the dear, foolish, little things out of which the history of a man's heart is made, and which are really so much more important than the things which the newspapers consider so—such as wars and bye-elections and the price of wheat.

For the first time he began to look at things through Elfrida's eyes; and there is nothing in the world that teaches us so much as looking at life from another person's point of view. One glimpse after this fashion is more instructive than a decade of Royal Academies, with an exhibition of the Old Masters thrown in. The more different the person happens to be in character and circumstances from ourselves, the more do we learn from the vision. But this art is not mastered save by men and women who have seen much of life, and who have felt even more than they have seen.

As Jack walked up the Old Hill at Teteigh he thought upon Philip Cartwright's story; and he felt a new thrill of

interest as he passed by the grey house (built after the fashion of the constellations) where the rector of Greystone had spent his boyhood; and then on past the other house at the top of the hill, where there was so much sunshine that the sun-dial grew old before its time because it never seemed to have a day off in which to rest itself. And as Jack passed by these places he congratulated himself that he was not as Philip Cartwright was, but that he had discovered and repented of his error before it was too late. Alas for him! "Too late" is an hour which comes upon us unawares, and is oftentimes already in the past, while we are still flattering ourselves that it forms part of an avoidable and highly improbable future.

As Jack Le Mesurier sat alone in the old Deanery at Silverhampton, he dreamed dreams of all that life was going to be to him with Elfrida at his side. He intended, of course, to do great things: who does not so intend on the sunny side of thirty?—and Jack had still a few weeks to spend on that sunny side; but he built no castles in the air whereof Elfrida was not the chatelaine, and he gained no imaginary triumph which was not destined to be laid at Elfrida's feet. He had left the army on coming into his title and estates; and he meant to devote himself to becoming an ideal landowner, reigning over ecstatically happy tenants, with Elfrida as his queen-consort. That Elfrida herself would have changed in any way, never once occurred to him. He thought it possible that she might find it difficult to forgive him for not having earlier forgiven her; but he never imagined that his forgiveness had ceased to be a matter of great moment to her. And this, not because he was conceited, but because he was himself unchangeable. He was amazed at Elfrida's having loved him in the first instance; but he would have been even more amazed to find that, having once loved him, she had left off doing so. Which state of mind did not arise from

his high opinion of himself, but from his high opinion of her.

When Jack Le Mesurier returned home from Silverhampton he learned that Miss Harland was back at the Dower House. So he did not wait for the conventional calling-hour, but hurried over to see her the first thing in the morning. Elfrida was working in her garden, Mrs. Seeley being busy indoors; and when Miss Harland perceived a fine, manly figure marching across the park, she experienced a sensation of unholy joy that at last her enemy was about to be delivered into her hands. No one could justify this unrighteous attitude of mind on the part of Elfrida; it was absolutely unjustifiable, and was only extremely natural. Jack had hurt her—now she meant to hurt Jack: such was Elfrida's idea of justice, and she intended to be unswervingly just in her dealings with Sir John Le Mesurier. The sin of letting evil go unpunished, was a sin that could never be laid to Miss Harland's charge; and the curse of transgressing with impunity, was a curse which was not destined to light upon Jack's head as long as Elfrida was at hand to shelter him from it. In order to harden her heart still further against the culprit, she strengthened herself with comparisons between Jack Le Mesurier and Philip Cartwright, all to the former's disadvantage; and when now and then her heart—tiresome thing!—forgot its cue, and brought forward evidence in favour of the accused, her mind speedily crushed it with some weighty and powerful argument on the other side.

“How silly of him to walk all through that wet grass, and get his feet soaked!” she said to herself, wisely endeavouring to be irritated with Jack whatever he did. “Philip Cartwright would have gone round by the road. It is so idiotic of men to run risks and trifle with their health in that way.”

Here her heart forgot itself for a moment. “But don't

you think that Philip is a bit fussy through having been a bachelor too long?" it whispered; "and don't you think it is rather refreshing to meet a man who is too strong to bother about such things?"

Elfrida crushed the offending member speedily. "I hate recklessness; it gives so much trouble to other people. And how tiresome of Jack to come early in the morning just when I am too busy to attend to him! Philip wouldn't have done anything so stupid. But Jack always was tactless, and always will be. I hate tactless people."

"Perhaps Philip was not quite so tactful as he is now when he was nine-and-twenty and in love for the first time," suggested that interfering heart of Elfrida's.

"The tactful man is always tactful," argued Elfrida's brain, "because tact is simply the power to understand another person's feelings. Philip always understands—Jack never did; and Philip would have had the sense to know that a woman doesn't care to be made love to before lunch."

But Elfrida's heart was in a troublesome mood, and would not be put to silence. "As long as a man can understand what he is feeling, he is not feeling very much; and when he is in earnest he makes love because he wants to make love, and not because he thinks a woman wants him to make it."

By that time Jack had come to the white palings which divided the garden of the Dower House from the park, and he cleared them at a bound. Elfrida was conscious of a contemptibly feminine and elementary thrill of admiration at the ease with which he did so; but she speedily subdued this purely savage instinct by the reflection that it was horribly boyish to jump over things instead of going through gates, and that she hated boys.

"Elfrida," said Jack, going up to her with outstretched

hands and all his heart in his eyes, "I have found that I cannot live without you, and I have come to ask you to forgive me for being such a beast."

Elfrida was somewhat taken aback by Jack's simple straightforwardness in going direct to the point. It irritated her by its want of subtlety. Like Miss Sarah Battle at whist, so Miss Harland at love was a stickler for the "rigour of the game." Still she intended to play the game through with Jack, however little he regarded the laws of it; and, what is more, she meant to beat him.

"It is late in the day to begin all that over again," she replied coldly, ignoring his proffered hands.

"I know it is, sweetheart; confoundedly late. But it has got to be begun all over again, and to be ended differently from how it was ended before, and so the sooner we begin the better."

"But I thought you had decided never to forgive me for not having taken for granted—without requiring the slightest proof—that you were made after an entirely different, and altogether superior, pattern from ninety-nine men out of every hundred."

"I did decide that at one time, more fool I! And now I have come to tell you that I perceive the folly of that idiotic decision."

Elfrida shrugged her shoulders. "I should like to adapt the Latin proverb, and say that he forgives twice who forgives quickly."

"But there was no need in this case to forgive twice, you see; so I should rather say that he who forgives slowly forgives once for all."

Now here Jack distinctly scored; and Elfrida felt accordingly irritated. It is always annoying when people do not play the part for which we have cast them. Elfrida decided that it was her *rôle* to be clever and Jack's to be

stupid ; and so she had every right to complain when the latter was less stupid than she had expected him to be. Miss Harland was gifted with that curse in disguise known as a vivid imagination ; and it is always dangerous for an imaginative woman to think much of persons whom she does not see. Unconsciously she magnifies them in her own mind—either for weal or for woe, as the case may be—until they become (to her) grotesque caricatures of themselves. If she frequently meets them in the flesh, their bodily presence brings her soaring imagination to earth again, and rights her victims in her eyes ; but if she does not see them face to face for some time, her imagination paints their portraits unchecked, and these portraits are very unlikelike indeed.

Elfrida had not seen Jack for over a year, so his image was considerably distorted in her mind. She had decided that he was stupid and obstinate—which, perhaps, was not altogether an unfounded accusation on her part ; but these attributes of Jack's had assumed such exaggerated proportions in her mind, that the Jack of Elfrida's imagination had become an inhuman monster, combining the pitilessness of a Juggernaut with the perceptions of a mole.

In the same way the troublesome imagination of Miss Harland had played tricks with the counterfeit presentment of the rector of Greystone ; for Philip had gone away from home just after Sir Roger's funeral, and had not yet returned. In his absence she had magnified his virtues to such an extent that he now appeared to her as a sort of modern King Arthur, sanctified by Holy Orders, and gifted with an intelligence which would have put Lord Bacon's to shame.

"Forgiveness which comes too late is no good to anybody," remarked Elfrida crossly ; "breakfast, which is not served until after luncheon, ceases to be breakfast, and is only an indigestible apology for afternoon tea."

Jack's boyish face grew pale and anxious. "Good heavens, Elfrida! do you mean to say that you are not going to forgive me?"

"Not at all; I am only pointing out that I am no longer anxious for you to forgive me."

"Elfrida, don't be hard on me. I know I behaved like a brute to you, but I am most awfully sorry for it; and I would give all that I possess to undo it, if only I could."

Elfrida's lip curled. "You were so kind to me when I begged for your pardon some time ago, that the mere memory of your goodness stimulates me with a desire to emulate it."

"I say, you are rather rough on a fellow, you know. But if you'd any idea how frightfully sorry I am, and how hideous my life has been without you, I'm sure you would be nice to me again and let bygones be bygones."

"Don't you know that if you will not do what people ask you when they ask you, it is of no use doing it after they have forgotten all about the matter, and have ceased to care whether you do it or not?" Elfrida never could resist the folly of being wise.

"I know that if I once care about a thing, I care about it always; and I thought you'd be the same as me," replied Jack, with more sincerity than grammar.

"That is so like a man! As long as it suited you to be angry you kept your rage up to boiling point, and didn't care how much you hurt me or how much I cared; and now that your fury has gradually cooled down, you graciously hold out the sceptre, and expect me to kiss the butt-end of it. And I sha'n't." Elfrida began to have an uncomfortable consciousness that Jack was decidedly better-looking than when she saw him last, and more manly, and altogether more attractive; therefore she began to lose her temper with him—a thing she had definitely decided beforehand not to do. It really was not fair of him to take advantage

of her in this way, she felt; and she resented his increased charm accordingly.

"Look here, dear," said Jack in a wheedling tone, "you are not going to spoil both our lives just because I once made an ass of myself."

Elfrida drew her slim figure up to its full height. "I shall not spoil my own life, you may rest assured; and as for the spoiling of yours, I fancy you did it yourself—that is to say, if there is any spoiling in the question, which I very much doubt."

"You don't mean what you say, dear; you know you don't."

"Excuse me, I am the best judge of that."

"Well, then, can you look me in the face and say that all this long time without me has been a happy time to you? You know you can't; and it has been a regular Inferno to me."

"Yes, I can."

"I don't believe it. You have tried to amuse yourself with books and flirtations, and a lot of trumped-up rot of that kind; but at the bottom of your heart you have missed me all the time."

Elfrida was very angry. Jack had not only discovered the truth—he had actually formulated it. He really was extremely stupid, she said to herself. Now that she saw the real Jack again and heard his voice, the old love for him began to stir in her heart, and this also annoyed her. That is the worst of love, and malaria, and influenza, and similar feverish complaints; it is years before one has recovered beyond the possibility of a relapse. So she recalled Philip Cartwright's many excellencies, and reminded herself how superior he was to Jack, counter-irritation being the only possible cure for the complaint called love.

"You flatter yourself," she said scornfully. "I am afraid that your power of making yourself indispensable is not quite so tremendous as you imagine"



## A Double Thread

"Look here, Elfrida, I don't want to bother you, or to make you more angry with me than you are already."

"That would be impossible," interpolated the girl, "even to a man of your varied attainments."

Jack took no notice of the interruption, but continued: "I know I was a brute to you last year, and I am awfully sorry for it; but, all the same, I had some excuse for losing my temper, as you really had played me rather a nasty trick, you know, and when I went away I was in a royal rage. But as I cooled down and came to my right mind again, I found that nothing had shaken—and nothing ever could shake—my love for you, and that life without you was simply too atrocious to be endured. So I have come back to ask you to forgive me, for the very good reason that I cannot live without you. I say, Ethel," he went on, unconsciously using the old name, "you've no idea how frightfully fond of you I am, or else you'd never play with me in this way."

"I am not playing with you; I am merely stating the truth. The fact that a truth happens to be unpalatable to you does not therefore transform it into a lie."

Elfrida was determined to have her revenge for all the pain that Jack had made her suffer; and the knowledge that she did not hate him as much as she assured herself she did, only served to add fuel to the fire of her anger.

Suddenly an idea struck Jack, which took all the gold out of the summer sunshine, and transformed the May morning into a November day. "Is there any one else?" he asked in a harsh, strained voice; "if there is, of course I am bound as a gentleman to let you alone; but if there isn't, I shall go on bothering you till you are obliged to come back to me. Tell me the truth, is there any one else?"

The temptation was too great. Here was a weapon put into Elfrida's hands whereby she could punish Jack to the

uttermost for all the suffering that he had inflicted on her. Being a woman—and, moreover, a woman out of temper—and, still further, a woman in love—she succumbed.

“Yes, there is,” she said shortly; and she added to herself that it was perfectly true, because she knew all the while that it was not.

Jack grew so white that she was frightened at what she had done. But she was not going to undo it. Until she had seen Jack again face to face, she had really been quite sure that she had transferred her affections from him to Philip Cartwright; and she felt that it would be ridiculous and undignified to change back again, just because the real Jack was so much more attractive than the Jack of her imagination. Which, of course, it would have been, and was; but it is one of Cupid's favourite tricks to make his victims do things which are ridiculous and undignified, and it is no use fighting against the mischievous little god. The best plan is to stand alongside of him, and to laugh with him at the foolish things which he makes us do; that puts him—and us—in a good humour.

“I suppose I have no right to complain,” said Jack, after a terrible pause.

“Certainly not,” replied Elfrida, letting herself go, because she was so frightened at Jack's set white face; “it is all your own doing, and you have no one but yourself to blame. I loved you, and you threw my love back in my face because I had done something which offended against the pitiless Moloch which you call your pride. I hope that now your pride, as you call it, is satisfied; at any rate my love has been crushed to death as its victim, and it is not my fault if the love which you thus killed cannot now come to life again, to play with you and amuse you. Then you went back to India and left me to my own devices; and you didn't care whether my heart was broken or not. As long as your own pride was appeased everything else might go,

as far as you were concerned, and the more I was humiliated the better you were pleased."

Elfrida paused to take breath, but Jack did not speak; he only stood still in an agony of despair, and his face looked grey and old in the morning sunshine. So she continued: "Then was it to be wondered at that if another man came by, who was humble where you had been proud and who was kind where you had been cruel, I was glad to see him? Are you surprised that the place in my life, which you had wilfully left empty, was refilled—and refilled by a man who understood me far better than you had ever done?"

Which last statement was quite true; but Elfrida forgot that comprehension and affection are not necessarily synonymous—are, in fact, in many cases diametrically opposed.

At last Jack spoke, and his voice trembled like the voice of an old man: "Then there is no more to be said. I have lost the best thing in life through my own arrant folly; and now there is nothing left for me to do but to take my punishment like a man. I hope that you will be happy, Elfrida, and I trust that the man you have chosen in my place will prove himself more worthy of you than I have been."

And thereupon he once more leaped over the white palings, and turned his eyes steadfastly towards Greystone so that Elfrida might not see the tears in them.

It was not difficult to Jack to guess who was his rival in Elfrida's affections. Little birds had whispered to him stories concerning the friendship existing between the rector and Miss Harland; and when a man is in love with a woman, he finds it hard to believe that other men are merely friendly towards her. So he made up his mind that Elfrida would reign at the rectory, and that his own house would evermore be left unto him desolate.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *ROBBEN ISLAND.*

"Yet I envy you, spite of your bitter pain ;  
Because, through earth's hubbub, which grates and jars,  
You are listening still to the far-off strain  
That is sung on high by the morning stars."

"I AM positively delirious with impotent rage," exclaimed Lady Silverhampton, sinking into an easy-chair in front of Elfrida's bedroom fire.

"Why, what's up?" asked Miss Harland, who was spending Whitsuntide at Grasslands.

"A new gown has come home that doesn't fit; and it is Saturday night, so I can't get my knife into my dressmaker till next week—and not till the middle of next week, seeing that this is that bothering old Whitsuntide. Mark my words, Elfrida, there is no rage so bitter as a clothes-rage; and there is no time so terrible for a clothes-rage as Saturday night. Sunday forms such an impassable gulf between you and the satisfying of your vengeance. Do you know, I've taken such a dislike to Sunday as a day? If everything goes well, it is depressing somehow; and if your clothes don't fit, it is a long-drawn-out torture. I don't know why one thinks so much more about one's clothes on Sunday than on any other day; I suppose because there's nothing else to think about."

"What is wrong with your new gown?" Elfrida made

inquiry, when her hostess paused for an instant to take breath.

"Oh, my dear, what isn't wrong with it? It is so high in the neck that I have to hold my head like a bird that is drinking, and it is so tight round the neck that it turns me black in the face; it is so narrow across the chest that I am like a trussed fowl in it, and it is so long in the skirt that I tumble on my nose every step I take. The mere thought of it excites my worst passions, as well it may! As I remarked before, there is no rage like a clothes-rage; and, you know, there was no such thing as murder in the world until after clothes had been invented."

"There are things in life more aggravating than clothes," sighed Elfrida; "namely, men."

"Good gracious, child, what nonsense! Men are not half so trying to the temper as clothes; and I must know better than you do because I am married, and married to Silverhampton, who is the most trying man I ever met."

"But, my dear Evelyn, when all is said and done, clothes can be sent back to be altered, and men can't—at any rate, not those who are old enough to be worth altering. You can do pretty much what you like with a gown after your first frenzy of fury against it is expended; but unfortunately you cannot let out a tuck in your husband's temper if it is too short, or insert a gusset into his views if they are too narrow, or put a false hem on to his brain if it is not quite large enough."

Lady Silverhampton, however, was not to be convinced.

"Anyhow, if your husband is horrid, people think how charming you are by contrast," she argued; "while if your gown is horrid, people invariably think how old and ugly you are getting, and don't see that it is all the fault of your dressmaker. Talking of dressmakers reminds me that mine is an awful fool to have made such a hash of that new gown of mine; and talking of fools reminds me that you are

the greatest I have ever met. I don't want to hurt your feelings, my dear ; but you really are."

"It is something to excel in any line ; and you have met a great many fools in your time, and by no means inconsiderable ones."

"But never your equal, Elfrida, never. You take an easy first in that school."

Now Elfrida, possessing the dramatic instinct, would rather be scolded than not talked about at all. The dramatic instinct is the extreme opposite of self-consciousness, which would rather not be talked about at all than even praised. So she rather enjoyed her ladyship's strictures than otherwise.

"You think that I was a fool to refuse Jack Le Mesurier," she said, taking out her hairpins and letting her hair fall in a golden shower about her shoulders ; "still, I had my reasons," she continued confidentially, a woman's hair and a woman's tongue generally being unloosed simultaneously. Men confide in each other less than women do because they have no back hair to let down beside one another's firesides.

"You mean that good-looking parson, I suppose. Don't mince matters and beat about the bush with me, my dear Elfrida ; it is not my custom to call spades by courtesy titles, and I've seen for a long time that you've been gone on that Cartwright man. He is very handsome, I admit, and he has got just the right sort of nose for a clergyman—so arched and Gothic, don't you know ? There are Sunday noses and week-day noses, and I cannot bear to see a clergyman with a week-day nose ; can you ?"

"What do you call week-day noses ?"

"Oh, cheerful turn-up noses, and Greek-statue noses, and all the secular sorts. A clergyman's nose ought always to be arched like a cathedral doorway. A *nez retroussé* suggests comedy, and a Greek nose suggests paganism. I think

that parsons with secular noses resemble Georgian churches, which always look to me like theatres spoiled."

"Oh, Evelyn, what an idea!"

"It is quite true. I never feel at all religious in a Georgian church, it is so drawing-roomy; just the thing for a wedding, of course, but not for a real serious service, don't you know? There is nothing more solemnizing than an arch, whether it be in the aisle of a cathedral or on a clergyman's face."

Elfrida nodded. "I know what you mean. Bow-noses are certainly more Sunday noses than any other sort. I suppose it is because they are Jewish and remind us of Scripture pictures; just as camels are Sunday animals and palms are Sunday trees."

"That Cartwright man has really got an ideal nose; I can't tell you how I admire it. It's the sort of nose that you see in pictures of angels and martyrs and clerical people of that sort. But all the same, my dear, you are a fool for pinning your faith to it, and for thinking that he will ever be as fond of you as Jack Le Mesurier has been."

"You are very rude," said Elfrida, rather coldly.

"Of course I am; you are my greatest friend."

Elfrida smiled, but did not speak.

"Now Jack would have been a perfect husband for you," Lady Silverhampton continued; "because he found out how horrid you really were, and still went on liking you. And he'd settle down contentedly with you at Greystone, and not bother about things."

"I hate contented men. There is only one thing worse than a discontented woman, and that is a contented man."

"Well, you would soon be the one if your husband wasn't the other; I can tell you that. And then Jack's nose is quite as good in its way as Mr. Cartwright's. Of course it isn't clerical; but there is no reason why it should be. I should call it an 'unsectarian' nose. I don't know exactly

what 'unsectarian' means, but I think it is something rather daring and wicked and attractive."

"I think Milton's Satan was unsectarian."

"Yes; and wasn't he a charming person? I think he is quite the nicest character in 'Paradise Lost'—though I've never read the book through."

"You see," said Elfrida, slowly drawing one of her golden locks through her fingers, "Jack Le Mesurier was all very well in his way, but he was never clever enough for me. I cannot bear stupidity, and Jack always was more or less stupid. He says the wrong thing, and is always putting his foot in it. He doesn't understand me in the least, and he and I have not the same interests; so I don't see how we could possibly be happy together."

Masculine intellect always concludes that if a woman abuses a man, she is not in love with him; it reasons, further, that if she proves she could not possibly be happy with that particular man, she will not be absolutely miserable without him. But feminine instinct knows better.

"Bosh!" said Lady Silverhampton, who was by no means lacking in feminine instinct. "It was awfully stupid of you to play that silly trick upon Captain Le Mesurier, of pretending to be a beggar-maid or an organist or something. Men are always annoyed at discovering there is anything that they don't know; and they all—even the nice ones—have a rooted prejudice against anything in the shape of a fib; why, I can't imagine, but they have; and we have to deal with them as they are, and not as we should like them to be. And then—after he had forgiven that mad prank of yours, and still wanted to marry you (which really was very sweet of him)—it was simple idiocy on your part to refuse him. It really was."

"A woman owes a duty to herself," continued Elfrida; "and if she marries a man who is intellectually her inferior, she lowers herself to his level; while, if she marries



a man who is superior to her, he soon will train her mind and educate her character until she attains the highest ideal that is possible to her nature."

"Good heavens, Elfrida!" Lady Silverhampton groaned; "don't talk to me as if you were *Queechy* and I were *The Wide, Wide World*, I beseech you. Besides, Jack Le Mesurier has been devoted to you now for quite a long time—even while he was angry he was still devoted, you see, or else he wouldn't have been angry; and I consider that the prize for 'regular attendance' is the most creditable prize that a man can win—far more creditable than all the prizes for intellect and learning and things of that kind."

But Miss Harland was not to be interrupted. "Of course it is absurd to couple my name with Philip Cartwright's in the way you are doing," she continued, with the natural indignation of the woman who likes to hear her name thus coupled; "but I cannot deny that my friendship with him has been one of the greatest benefits I ever enjoyed in my life. He is such an understanding man—besides being so wise and clever—that one can tell him nothing that he doesn't enter into."

"A man is none the less nice for not understanding a woman—and he thinks her all the nicer," Lady Silverhampton interpolated.

"He understands so thoroughly all that one thinks and feels, that talking to him is like talking to another woman."

"Then I don't believe he is in love with you, Elfrida; for when a man is, it isn't at all like talking to another woman. Surely you have learnt as much as that."

"Philip Cartwright isn't like other men."

"Stuff! There is very little variety in men; there are about six religions and two politics and one way of falling in love; so that, though they may slightly vary in the two former lines of business, they are absolutely identical in

their treatment of the last. Do you think that the Cartwright man is in love with you?"

"I don't know," replied Elfrida, with a smile that meant she thought she did.

"Does he write to you?" catechized Lady Silverhampton, who was always consumed by absorbing curiosity regarding affairs of the heart.

"Yes."

"Long letters?"

"Well, not exactly long, but awfully nice ones."

"Pooh! the niceness is nothing—it is the length that counts. Niceness takes no time; but a long letter is always a compliment, however nasty it may be. Then does he talk to you a lot of nonsense about feelings in the abstract, in the way you are so fond of doing?"

"Yes; that is one reason why I like him so much."

"Ah! that is another bad sign. When a man is really in love he doesn't talk about feelings in the abstract. He wants to know what A said to you, and what you said to A, and then he wants to go and punch A's head."

"You are very rude," Elfrida repeated.

"So you have already remarked. But it riles me to see you throwing away the substance of Jack Le Mesurier for the shadow of Philip Cartwright. In spite of your devotion to the Church, you must admit that a layman in the hand is worth two parsons in the bush."

"But you don't seem to understand how much more companionable I find Philip than Jack."

"I don't believe it. I own that Mr. Cartwright is a delightful man to sit next to at a party; he says the right thing, and he listens when you do. But he is a man with convictions; and a man with convictions always asks unsuitable people to dinner and lives on the wrong side of London, and so is dreadfully tiresome as a husband. Besides which, you haven't got him as a husband, and I

don't believe you ever will. I fancy he was once in love with some woman who died or married or went abroad or something, and that he'll never marry again."

"He cannot marry *again*," objected Elfrida, "seeing that he has never married at all."

"How fussy you are! I always call it marrying again when people have been engaged or anything before. And if you are going to be so particular about my language I'm off to bed, for I'm far too sleepy to pick my words. Heigho! here have I been wasting my time talking about such a trifle as your future husband, when I ought to have been giving my attention to my new gown, and deciding whether I will have a London physician down to see it, or whether I will get it admitted into the Home for Incurables. I always was far too unselfish, and this is a proof of it. Good-night, my dear; you have been a perfect lunatic to refuse Jack Le Mesurier, and I think you the greatest idiot I know; but I like you, and I always shall, you are so delightfully pretty."

After her ladyship had rushed out of the room, Elfrida still sat staring into the fire.

"I am sure I am in love with Philip Cartwright," she thought to herself, "because I agree with all his views on religion and art and politics and society, and therefore enjoy discussing everything with him; and I am sure I am not in love with Jack, because I never want to talk anything but nonsense with him. The restful affection I have for Philip is far more comfortable than the silly, feverish sort of thrill I feel—I mean I used to feel—for Jack. How school-girlish it was! I wonder what Jack is doing now, and whether he minds dreadfully that I won't be friends with him. I expect he does. There comes a certain look in his eyes when he really minds things, and his voice has a queer, hoarse sound; and both his eyes and his voice showed it when I punished him that morning.

I would give anything to know what he actually felt, and what he did after he left me. I wonder whether he cared enough to cry, or whether men ever do cry about things like that. If he did, poor boy! there was no one to comfort him, all by himself in that big, old house; and yet it would have been rather nice to be the person to comfort him, somehow. I shall never forget how white his face was, and how the muscles round his mouth twitched when I told him I cared for some one else. I wonder if he is fretting now, or whether he is getting over it. I hope he won't fret till he makes himself ill; but it is very likely, as Jack always was careless about his health; and if he does, there'll be nobody to look after him, poor old boy! I wish he had a sister or a mother to see that he takes proper care of himself. But I was quite right to tell him the truth, however painful it might be. And I am perfectly certain that I'm far more in love with Philip than I am with Jack; he is much more my sort. But Evelyn never did understand me, and never will; it is funny that she is so stupid where I am concerned, as she generally has such quick perceptions."

Then Miss Harland roused herself sufficiently to ring for her maid; and all the time that the latter was brushing out the wealth of golden hair, Elfrida continued mentally to congratulate herself on her unflinching straightforwardness in speaking the truth to her old lover, and to wonder why Lady Silverhampton's usually acute perceptions had failed so signally in diagnosing her own present condition. "I believe she still actually thinks I am in love with Jack," Elfrida said to herself; "it really isn't like Evelyn to be so stupid!"

When the party at Grasslands broke up after Whitsuntide, Elfrida spent a few days at Sunnysdale with her grandparents, and enjoyed the privilege of beholding, for the first time, the amiable side of feminine society there. Mrs.

Cottle received her with open arms, and called upon her the day after her arrival.

"My dear Miss Harland," she began, "I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to me to welcome you once more into our midst."

"Thank you," replied Elfrida, who could not help remembering that, in the days of her assumed poverty, it had been the one aim and object of the good ladies of Sunnydale to drive her out of their midst. But circumstances alter cases, as everybody knows whose circumstances have ever undergone any alteration.

"I always felt," Mrs. Cottle continued, "that you were not altogether what you seemed." (This was quite true.) "In fact, it is a peculiarity of mine to discover true refinement under whatsoever guise it may be hidden. All my family have the same gift: we know a real lady when we see one." This also was true as far as it went, for Mrs. Cottle's idea of a real lady was a person who never wore a last year's gown; and it is quite easy to recognize such a person on a very slight acquaintance.

"I see, like the princess and the pea in Hans Andersen."

"Ah! dear Miss Harland, I have not read the novel to which you allude, I am ashamed to say; but I feel sure it must be quite a correct one, or so genteel a young lady as yourself would not condescend to quote it; so I shall recommend it to my dear girls without delay. Their papa and I are so careful about what they read; we like them to confine themselves to standard works as far as possible, or to the magazines which are published for Sunday reading. I think one cannot be too careful in the training of young girls."

Elfrida, who was considerably the junior of the Miss Cottles, smiled.

"I am always so thankful that there is nothing frivolous about my dear girls," the proud mother continued; "they make it a rule never, if possible, to meet any person, however

casually, without teaching that person something and learning something in return; and it is this habit which has rendered them so well-informed. I assure you, Janetta can tell you the staple commodity of all the towns in England and Scotland straight off; while there is not a fancy stitch in crochet or tatting of which Emmeline is not complete master. Oh! I have every reason to be proud of my girls."

"They are certainly most exceptional," agreed Elfrida; and their mother, mistaking this for a compliment, was delighted.

But there was no one at Sunnysdale so much altered as Julia Welford; and this transformation scene was totally independent of any change in Elfrida's circumstances. Julia had become engaged to a curate, an old schoolfellow of Percy's; and her bitterness had evaporated like the mist of the morning. It is but rarely that feminine cynicism survives the test of an established place and position in the scheme of the universe: this is an alkali which will successfully counteract all acidity in ninety-nine women's hearts out of every hundred; and Julia Welford's was one of the ninety-nine. Her curate was an admirable young man, as Julia was well aware. His manners, however, left much to be desired, and his sermons even more; but this, of course, she did not know; she was in love with him. Still he had the makings of a man in him, and of a good man too; there was work for him to do in the world, and he was going to do it; and he was going to do it all the better because he had found one woman to believe in him and worship him whilst his intellect was as yet in its chrysalis state and his power was a promise rather than a possession. Mahomet is by no means the only prophet who has been able to say "Khadija believed in me when no one else did," and who has owed much of his subsequent success and strength to this belief.

In return, the curate had bridled Julia's tongue, and had taught her that her battle against the world was a useless and unwarrantable warfare; and this, not by preaching at her, but by merely showing her that she formed an integral part of life's happiness as far as he was concerned. So much can two quite ordinary human beings do for each other.

"I want you to pardon me for being so unkind to you," she said humbly to Elfrida; "I knew I was hateful; but it is only since I became engaged to Leonard that I have seen how detestable I used to be. Isn't it wonderful how caring for good people shows one one's own faults?"

"I suppose it does. And please don't think any more about not being kind to me when I was masquerading as Ethel: it was horrid of me to play such a trick, and I deserved any snubbing that I might get."

"But that is no excuse for me: the fact that I believed you to be poor, ought to have made me all the kinder to you. It is only since I met Leonard, and saw how beautiful real goodness is, that I have learnt how wrong it was of me to go through life finding fault with everybody and everything, and caring only for my own selfish pleasures. But one cannot go on being selfish and horrid after one has been brought into contact with such a life as his."

Thus, by thinking each other perfect, do we poor faulty men and women ourselves draw nearer to perfection.

But Elfrida did not linger long at Sunnydale. Philip Cartwright had returned to Greystone, he informed her in one of his delightful, though short, epistles; and she was anxious to see him again—at least so she said to herself, and she was naturally the only reliable authority on the subject.

The morning after her arrival at the Dower House there came a ring at the front-door bell. Elfrida's heart gave a great throb, and she wondered if it was Jack; but she

speedily corrected herself, and hoped that it was Philip. With a success which does not attend all our wishes, the hope was fulfilled ; so of course Miss Harland was delighted, and even went so far as to assure herself that she was, as she looked in the glass and patted her fringe preparatory to welcoming her visitor.

“ How do you do ? ” she said, holding out both her hands as she walked across her drawing-room to meet him. “ I am most awfully glad to see you again, and it is so nice of you to come and see me so soon after my return home.”

“ It isn't really, because I wanted to come. A great deal has happened to me since I saw you last, and I want to talk to you about it all.”

“ Then let us sit down and have a nice long chat. Arabella has gone for a walk, so we shall not be interrupted by her ; and I do hope no bothering callers will come. But that is hardly likely in the morning.”

Elfrida was conscious of an absurd desire on her part to listen for another ring at the front-door bell. In fact, so intently was she bent on this fruitless and ridiculous exercise that it was with difficulty she recalled her wandering attention to the rector's conversation. When she did so she found him saying : “ So I stayed on in London, seeing a great many old friends both in high and low life ; and it is always a solemn experience renewing old friendships. With some friends one can leave a bookmarker just where one left off, and begin again in exactly the same place ; while with others one has to read friendship's preface over again every time one meets them ; whereby much time is wasted.”

“ Yes, isn't it horrid ? ”

“ It is indeed ; it is so disheartening. Often the sight of an old friend destroys a friendship instead of renewing it ; and I always think that is a terribly sad thing to happen. Don't you know how you cherish an old friend in your heart, and write to him as he used to be, and think how



pleased he will be to hear this about you, and how grieved he will be to hear that? Then suddenly you come face to face with a stranger, who bears his name and wears his bodily presence, yet who is a totally different person from the friend of your memory, and totally indifferent to both your joys and your sorrows. And so you lose your old friend, and there is nothing left of him—not even a grave.”

“Yes, I know,” said Elfrida absently. She was wondering why that front-door bell did not ring again; it was quite time for it to do so, and she was beginning to think that it really was not a satisfactory front-door bell at all; just as sometimes we feel inclined to dismiss our postman because he is so sadly remiss in bringing us the letters for which we are longing. Surely bells and postmen ought to know their duty a little better than this!

The rector, however, was so full of his own concerns just then that he did not notice her abstraction, but went on: “I am thinking of making a great change in my life, and I have come to talk to you about it.”

“He is going to ask me to marry him,” Elfrida said to herself; and this interested her so much that she even forgot to listen for the bell.

“You and I so generally think alike upon questions, and look at things from the same point of view,” he continued, “that I feel very little doubt about our seeing eye to eye in this matter. Nevertheless I want to hear from your own lips that it is so.”

Elfrida felt piqued. “He makes pretty sure that I shall accept him,” she thought; “Jack was younger and better-looking than he is, yet he was never so cocksure of himself as this.”

“Do you remember, Miss Harland, the first time I met you at dinner at the Silverhamptons’?”

“Yes, perfectly well. I wore my pale blue brocade.”

"Did you? I am afraid I did not notice that; but I can distinctly recall all the things we talked about."

It was noteworthy that Philip could have told, even now, exactly what gown Laura Greenfield had worn on every occasion; but of course Elfrida was not aware of this. It is always fortunate that a woman has no way of finding out exactly what a man thinks of another woman; otherwise life might be far less pleasant than it is—both for women and men.

"I remember we discovered then that we thought alike and agreed about many things," said Elfrida.

"I know we did; and that is why I feel so sure that we shall agree about a very great thing now. So let me begin my story at the beginning. First, I have been offered the bishopric of Camchester."

"Have you? How very interesting! You are just the man for a bishop, as you have the gift of statesmanship, and one of the few complexions that won't look sallow in purple."

Mr. Cartwright laughed, and Elfrida decided in her own mind that, as a bishop's wife, she should always be very charming to the minor clergy, but should not bother herself much about their wives.

"I saw the Prime Minister while I was up in town," the rector continued, "and he seemed very desirous that I should accept the see, as it comprises a large manufacturing district, and he was kind enough to say that it requires a man of affairs at its head."

"And you are a thorough man of affairs, you know," Elfrida said; "you have in such unusual measure the uncommon quality of common sense." She was thinking that, if she married a bishop, she should give up wearing a hat on Sunday, and take to a bonnet; it seemed so much more episcopal.

"It is very kind of you to say so, and still kinder of you

to think so, Miss Harland. Don't you know how delightful it is when our friends agree with us with regard to our own virtues? As a rule they have a reprehensible trick of thinking we are weak where we consider ourselves strong, and *vice versâ*. Now, to tell the truth, I pride myself upon my common sense; therefore I am prepared to find that my friends see in me a sentimental and visionary faddist; and it is indeed a treat to find that you support my opinion."

"I really do," replied Elfrida, who was enough of a woman of the world to have said she did even if she did not. A woman who disagrees about things that do not signify, is an evil and a bitter thing. However, as she actually did think alike with the rector this time, she enlarged upon the subject. "I am sure you would make quite an ideal bishop, you have such princely manners. I don't think you have any idea how very lordly you are; sometimes it is quite like a confirmation—if not a charge—to hear you ask for a second cup of tea." It is strange how easy some women find it to say pretty things to a man if they do not love him, and how difficult if they do.

"Well, I have thought the matter over both carefully and prayerfully, as no one has a right to set so great an honour lightly on one side; and the cant of pretending that one's affections are so securely set upon things above that one is incapable of appreciating sublunary honours, is an affectation whereof I trust I may never be guilty. It is like singing hymns on a Sunday begging for earthly dishonour and the lowest place, and then spending all one's week-days in improving one's social position and weeding-out one's visiting acquaintance—a contradiction not infrequent in religious circles. But, after careful thought, I came to the decision that a bishopric is not for me."

"Why on earth not? I should have thought that you were made for it," exclaimed Elfrida, hardly believing that she had heard aright.

"No—oh! no. Perhaps if my lot had been different—if I had had some one to share life's good things with me—I might have accepted such things and made a right use of them: I cannot tell. All I know now is that my life—or rather the preface to my life, as one's earthly existence is no more than that—is spoiled past reparation, and that success and failure, riches and poverty, are henceforth alike to me; as they have been alike ever since the woman I loved left me, and turned the brightness of my noonday into night."

Philip's eyes were dreamy with memories of Laura, so he did not see the consternation written on Elfrida's face.

"Therefore," he continued, "I have come to the conclusion that if real happiness is denied to us, there is no good in straining after some feeble imitation of it. If the cup of joy is placed in a man's hands, I should call him morbid if for some sentimental reason he put it on one side, and chose the cup of bitterness instead. God has given it to him—therefore let him drink it and be thankful, and not worry himself with absurd notions that unhappiness would have been better for his character; that is God's business, not his. But if the cup of happiness is denied him in spite of all his prayers and entreaties, then let him drink the cup of duty and cease from rebelling against the inevitable, hoping that in another world than this whatever he has lacked here shall be made up to him. So I have declined the bishopric of Camchester, and decided to go out as a missionary to the lepers on Robben Island."

"You—as a missionary to lepers? I never heard of such a thing in my life."

Philip's face fell. "You and I are so much alike that I thought you would understand. Please don't scold me. I know I have chosen rightly, but I want to hear you say that you think so too. Old as I am, I am still enough of a child to long for praise and approbation, and to feel miserable and homesick without it."

Elfrida pulled herself together. What a fool she had been, she said to herself! Still there is one thing worse than being a fool, and that is letting other people know that you have been a fool; and if Miss Harland was not clever enough to avoid the one evil, she was quite capable of keeping clear of the other. Moreover, it was only her vanity that was hurt and not her love; and when Vanity masquerades in Love's garments, he can get over wounds, and be none the worse for them, the smart whereof would make Love swoon with pain. So she managed to talk to the rector about his plans; and so successfully simulated sympathy and interest, that Philip—not being in love with her—was completely taken in, and congratulated himself that he had not relied in vain upon the friendship and support of this charming woman. It is a remarkable fact that adaptability is a woman's crowning virtue in the eyes of all men save the one who loves her; and he cannot endure it.

So Philip Cartwright confided his hopes and ideals of missionary life to Elfrida, while she listened to and applauded him. Never having felt anything but friendship for her, he did not dream that she had ever felt anything but friendship for him; and, as a matter of fact, she had not; but she had pretended to herself that she had, in order to hurt Jack—just as one takes a cake from a naughty boy and gives it to a good one, not to please the one but to punish the other.

After the rector had concluded his call, Elfrida sat alone amid the ruins of her house of cards, and felt decidedly upset. Then she carefully removed Love's garments from Vanity's stricken form, and found that the latter's wounds, though extremely painful, were by no means serious. So she set about putting salve on them, and binding them up; and began the cure by looking at herself in the glass, and then by dwelling upon the fact that Mr. Cartwright was much stouter and less attractive than he used to be. As

Vanity appeared to revive under this skilful treatment, she went on to assure herself that it might be wearisome to spend one's life with a man who was so absorbed in the contemplation of the Thirty-Nine Articles, that he was oblivious of the existence of pale blue brocade; which doctrine had so salutary an effect upon the invalid, that Elfrida was encouraged to continue the cure by insisting upon the fact that nothing would have induced her to marry the rector even if he had asked her, and that it was therefore a good thing that he had perceived this, and had so saved himself from the mortification of a refusal. Thus did Elfrida Harland nurse her wounded vanity until its temperature was restored to within a few degrees of normal; and she did not leave it until she was satisfied that it was completely out of danger, and that now nothing remained to be done but to get up its strength again.

But while Vanity was making such rapid strides towards convalescence, poor Love was suffering more and more through the negligence of that careless front-door bell. It was now close upon lunch-time; and yet that bell had never so much as quivered since the rector rang it a couple of hours ago. It certainly needed the bell-hanger to see to it, as it was turning its office into a perfect sinecure. Love was starving; and lack of nourishment is a serious thing for Love; yet that reprehensible bell remained silent, though Love was faint with the longing to hear it ring.

Elfrida looked her soul full in the face; and she realized that her fancy for Philip Cartwright had been an imaginary thing, wherewith she had striven to lull the pain of her longing for Jack. For a time it had succeeded in soothing the pain, and so she imagined that the pain was cured; but the old void in her life had begun to ache more than ever, now that it was emptied of the shams and rubbish whereby she had endeavoured to choke it up. She had not only refused Jack and deliberately sent him out of her life, which

he might have forgiven ; but she had told him that she loved another man—a thing far more difficult to forgive. There was no way out of her wretchedness, as far as she could see. True, she had not really loved Philip—she had only thought that she did ; but if Jack had found it so hard to pardon her for deceiving him once, how could he ever find it in his heart to pardon her for doing it a second time ? And he would never be able to understand that it was herself she was deceiving and not him.

Altogether Elfrida's cup of misery was full to overflowing ; and it was but little comfort to her to remember that she had, with her own hands, mixed the potion which she found it so bitter to drink.

So she wished that she was dead, and ate no lunch that day.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CONCLUSION.

"Tell me, sweetheart, can I ever forget thee,  
Ever regret that I worshipped thee so;  
Ever can cease to rejoice that I met thee,  
Met thee and loved thee a long time ago?"

LATE in the afternoon of that same day the front-door bell at the Dower House suddenly remembered itself, and endeavoured to make up for lost time by a peal that very nearly brought the house down. Elfrida had denied herself to visitors, because her eyes were swollen up with crying; but at the sound of that bell she changed her mind, and decided to see the only person who would dare to ring her bell like that.

Sir John Le Mesurier had been riding all day, and riding clothes are peculiarly becoming to a man; even poor Elfrida's eyes, swollen as they were, still retained enough of their wonted fire to perceive this.

"What is this I hear?" he began, too much excited to pause for ordinary greetings. "Is it true that Cartwright has refused a bishopric, and is going out as a missionary to the lepers on Robben Island?"

Elfrida nodded her head without speaking. She had not the spirit left to speak, everything seemed so horrid.

"Then you have refused him after all?" Jack's face was all aglow.

Now a meaner woman than Elfrida would have let



the supposition pass, and Philip was too much of a gentleman ever to have set it straight. Elfrida knew this ; but, though extremely foolish, she did not happen to be mean.

"No, I didn't," she said with an effort ; "because he never asked me."

Jack's face grew very black. "Do you mean to say that he behaved like a cad to you? Because if he did, I'll wring his neck, parson or no parson !"

It is to be noted that Philip was Jack's greatest friend ; but Friendship and Love rarely consent to hold office in the same ministry.

"Oh ! no ; he didn't behave in the least badly ; it was all a mistake. But I don't see the good of trying to explain it to you, for you will never understand," said Elfrida despairingly.

"Then don't try to explain ; I can believe what you tell me without any explanation."

Whereupon Elfrida naturally at once began to explain. "You see, I knew I was in love with somebody, and I couldn't for shame own to myself that it was with you, because you were so angry with me and had thrown my love back in my face. So I pretended, in my own mind, that it was with Philip Cartwright. But it wasn't really—it was with you."

"With me?—after I had been such a brute to you?"

"You weren't a bit of a brute, Jack ; it was I who was such a beast to deceive you about Ethel."

"Indeed it was not !" replied Jack indignantly. "You had a perfect right to try my affection and see if it was the real thing or not ; but it was I that was to blame for being such a fool as to be angry with you. I cannot forgive myself, and never shall."

"There is nothing to forgive. You were right to be furious with any woman for deceiving you. It is I who

cannot forgive myself and never shall." And Elfrida began to cry.

"There is nothing to forgive, sweetheart," said Jack, taking her in his arms. "You didn't mean to deceive me. It was an error of judgment, perhaps, on your part to play a trick upon such an obstinate, pig-headed fool as myself, who hadn't the wit to see that you had never once gone beyond the rules of the game, or done anything that was not strictly fair play; but it was nothing more. And you are quite sure that you never really cared for Cartwright?"

"Absolutely; as I am that he never cared for me."

"Then he was an ass," remarked Jack, who now found it as difficult to forgive the rector for not loving Elfrida as he had before found it for doing so; "and I would gladly horsewhip him if it would give you the slightest satisfaction."

"It wouldn't. He never knew anything about it."

"Did anybody guess that you liked him?" asked Jack, not without jealousy.

"Evelyn Silverhampton guessed that I didn't."

"Ah! clever woman that!"

"And now I am going to tell you all about everything from the beginning," said Elfrida, nestling contentedly in the strong arms that encircled her.

"I would rather you did not, my darling. Explanations are messy things at best, and if people really love one another there is no need for them. I never met with any difficulty yet, that explanations didn't make worse. The cleverest woman I knew out in India used to say that by the time an explanation is necessary it is useless."

"But, Jack dear, I want to make it clear to you how horrid I have been, and how frightfully sorry I am that I vexed you."

"And I want to make it clear to you how detestable I

have been, and how furious I am with myself that I could ever have been such a brute ; so we are quits."

Elfrida laughed a low laugh of perfect contentment. "Then we are like people who are equally in debt to each other, and so no money need change hands."

"Exactly ; and we won't talk about our blunders any more ; we will only talk about how much we love each other."

"But the same principle might be applied to that also, don't you see ? If we love each other equally, no protestations of affection need change hands."

"Perhaps they needn't, but I think it would be a good deal jollier if they did. So I intend that they shall."

And Jack had his way.

Lady Silverhampton was delighted at the news of the engagement. As Jack and Elfrida had first met at her house, she felt that their attachment to each other was a sort of invention of hers, and she found pleasure in it accordingly. People will always be pleased about anything if they can be persuaded that it was their suggestion in the first instance, and not the product of any alien brain : and the really clever folks are those who appear to be receiving impressions when they are in reality conveying them ; and who, like an engine at the back of a train, are actually drawing when they appear to be drawn.

The week after the engagement was announced, the lovers went to stay at Grasslands, and were praised as heartily by their hostess as if they had done something that they did not like, instead of something that they did.

"You dear people," she said to them one afternoon, as they were having tea in the fine old garden, "it is so nice to see you both look so happy ! I can't bear people who don't look happy ! Unhappiness suggests poverty and indigestion and new clothes, and all sorts of horrors. It is worse in women than in men. It is the duty of all women

to look happy—the married ones to show that they don't wish they weren't married, and the unmarried ones to show that they don't wish they were."

"Still I expect that is what they both are wishing, if the truth must be told," suggested Lord Stonebridge, who was also staying at Grasslands for a day or two.

"But the truth mustn't be told; you are old enough to have learnt that years ago. The one object of all our lives is to conceal the truth at any price. For instance, I have broad shoulders, and Elfrida has narrow ones; and I love and praise my dressmaker in so far as she makes me look narrow, and Elfrida loves and praises hers in so far as she makes her look broad. In the same way, because I am short, I have my hair done so as to make me seem tall, and Elfrida, being tall, does her hair so as to take something off her height. It seems to me a ridiculous system, I confess; but it is the system that obtains under the sun."

"It runs through everything," added Miss Harland; "women who hate their husbands call them 'my dear,' and women who love their husbands pretend that they don't; young girls swim into a room like stuffed swans, and aged women hop and skip like lambs, in order that the former may not seem young, and the latter may not appear old. Now it cannot be a disgrace to be both old and young, and it cannot be equally reprehensible to love and hate one's husband; so surely one of the two types could afford to appear what it really is."

"I think it is a disgrace to be young," said Lady Silverhampton. "I cannot stand youth at any price. Youth and boiled mutton are the only two things in the world that I really hate."

"You should never say that openly," corrected Lord Stonebridge, "or people will think you are jealous."

"My dear Stonebridge, what an idea! Just think of it. I jealous of raw, infallible creatures, who live on chocolate-

creams and believe in palmistry! Now can you look me full in my carefully-preserved face, and tell me you candidly believe that I could feel jealous of a young girl?"

"No, I could not," said his lordship truthfully.

"Then don't talk nonsense. If you do, I shall punish you by sending you in to dinner with a very young girl."

"Dear lady, as you are strong be merciful!"

"Dear man, as you are old be sensible, or I shall do my worst. There are several cases of what I should call virulent and inflammatory youth in the neighbourhood, and I will send you in to dinner with one of them as sure as my name is Evelyn Silverhampton."

"Which it is not," said Lord Stonebridge under his breath.

"Then what is it, I should like to know?"

"Evelyn Fairfax, Countess of Silverhampton."

"Fudge! As I have told you before, accuracy is your besetting sin; and it is a very detestable one, beside carrying age. You will be an octogenarian by the time you are sixty, if you go on in this tiresome manner."

"My lady, my lady, your statements are too loose even for casual conversation. A man of sixty couldn't be an octogenarian, even to please you."

"Then you'll be a hexagon or a hexameter, or whatever it is—that don't matter; but what does matter is that you'll be a bore. In fact, you are almost one already, with your statistics about octogenarians and countesses. You really are."

"He will bear patiently any amount of abuse," said Jack Le Mesurier, "as long as you don't send him in to dinner with a young girl."

"Well, he'll have both if he doesn't look out. I'll send him in, not only with a young girl, but with an intelligent young girl—one that has learnt botany, and can tell him what family the table decorations belong to; and if that doesn't spoil his dinner I don't know what will."

“But why try to spoil his dinner?” Elfrida asked.  
 “Men love a good dinner, and his seems a deserving case.”

“Because he said I was jealous of young girls.”

“No, I did not,” pleaded the culprit; “I said that other people would say you were.”

His hostess shook her finger at him. “That was worse; it was not only disagreeable but cowardly as well. I am ashamed of you, Stonebridge!”

Jack and Elfrida smiled at each other, but did not speak. They were both too happy to talk much just then.

“By the way, Elfrida,” continued Lady Silverhampton, “what have you done with those grandparents of yours, that you went to stay with the last time you were here? Are they still at Sunnydale?”

“Yes; but they are leaving there at once, and going to live at Jack’s old house at Silverhampton—the one that his aunt left him. Isn’t it good of Jack to lend it to them?”

Elfrida was so rich that she loved to receive favours, yet rarely did so. That is the worst of being wealthy; kindness is so seldom shown to rich people, because they are supposed not to need it. As a matter of fact, they do not; but as a matter of something greater than fact, they do.

“Oh, how lovely!” exclaimed her ladyship; “I never heard of anything more fitting and sweet. I do so delight in grandparents—they are such picturesque relations. I always say that one’s parents are a necessity, one’s grandparents an ornament, and one’s husband’s parents a nuisance.”

“Really, really, Lady Silverhampton, this will never do!” said Jack. “You are positively shocking us.”

“Am I? Well, none of you were ever married to the Dowager Lady Silverhampton’s son, so you don’t know. But to return to Elfrida’s sheep—I mean her grandparents. That is a lovely old house at Silverhampton, and just the very place for preserving grandparents. I have been

there several times. I forget the name of it, but it is called the Vestry or the Psaltery or the Belfry or something."

"The Deanery," suggested Jack.

"Oh! yes, that's it. I knew it was something that ended with 'y' and had to do with religion. I adore Silverhampton—the town I mean, not the man. At least, I mean the man too, of course; but it is my business to adore the man, and my pleasure to adore the town."

"Some people make a business of pleasure," Lord Stonebridge remarked; "and others a pleasure of business."

"Don't interrupt! You talk so much that I can't get a word in edgeways. What was I saying? You've made me forget by interrupting. Oh! I know; I was talking about Silverhampton, and Elfrida's grandparents. It is quite the nicest town I know. I think it is so sweet for the same place to have grand old churches and deaneries, and then ironworks and collieries as well. It is like playing games on a Sunday, or reading a religious novel, or driving in a carriage that will both open and shut. I do love everything that is something else as well. Things and people which are only themselves are so dull."

"I didn't find it a success to be somebody else," said Elfrida.

"No, I know you didn't. Still, it must have been rather fun while you were at it, and it has all turned out well in the end. I am so glad that you are going to marry a stupid man; it will be so much nicer for you than if he was clever."

"Thank you," said Jack.

"Oh! I beg your pardon; I forgot you were there. Nevertheless, you must see for yourself how much better it is for Elfrida to marry you than to marry a clever man who could see through her; now, isn't it?"

"Much; both for her and for me," laughed Jack

"But he can see through me," objected Elfrida; "I keep nothing from him now, but tell him all my thoughts."

Lady Silverhampton shrugged her shoulders. "Pooh! I think nothing of that sort of seeing through; it is like those archways which seem to lead into a second drawing-room, and turn out to be nothing but a looking-glass. I hate those things. The Sunnydales have got one in their house in town; and one day I saw such a horrid, fat, little woman in the back drawing-room, as I thought, and it turned out to be me. Wasn't it sickening?"

"It was impossible," said Jack.

"No, it wasn't; it really happened. I think it is such a comfort that we none of us know what we look like; otherwise we should never go out at all."

"You flatter us," Lord Stonebridge remarked.

"Don't be sarcastic, Stonebridge; it doesn't suit your style at all. Heavy common-sense is your *rôle*, and you ought to stick to it. When you try to make jokes, you are as bad as the provision-shops that sell toys at Christmas. A most unfair arrangement for the regular toy-shops, I always think! I wonder it is allowed."

"What is my *rôle*?" Elfrida wondered.

"A stately manner, added to a sharp tongue. When you make love to Jack, you are committing the sin of the provision-shops."

"Then what is Jack's line?"

"A fine physique, splendid pluck, and no brains. If ever he does see through you, he will be selling toys at Christmas, or its equivalent."

"Would it be beside the mark to inquire the nature of your ladyship's *rôle*?" asked Jack.

"Vapid frivolity and good-natured heartlessness," replied Lady Silverhampton with a laugh. Then suddenly she jumped up from her seat and turned as white as a sheet. 'Good gracious! there is a groom leading Silverhampton's



horse up the avenue, all covered with mud, and no rider. What can have happened? That is the horse that he went out riding upon just after lunch. I am certain there must have been an accident. Oh, my poor old boy! What shall I do if he is hurt?" And before any one could speak, Lady Silverhampton was half-way towards the avenue, running as fast as a girl of sixteen.

"Even she also emulates the provision-dealers!" said Elfrida, as the three started in pursuit.

"It's all right," panted her ladyship, when they reached her and the groom; "Silverhampton has had a nasty tumble, but he isn't hurt. The horse put his foot in a rabbit-hole as they were galloping across the common, and came down; but fortunately with such force that Silverhampton fell quite clear of him. Oh dear!" she added, putting her hand on her heart; "what a fright it has given me! I thought I should have died when I saw them coming up the avenue without him. I think, if you good people will amuse yourselves for a bit, I will go and lie down, I feel so bad. And I must be all right by the time he comes home; it upsets him most awfully if there is anything wrong with me."

"Yes, go, dear," said Elfrida gently. "There is nothing at all to worry about, you know; but it will set you up to rest a little."

"By the way, I forgot to tell you that Mr. Cartwright is arriving this afternoon to pay us a farewell visit before going abroad. Would you mind receiving him, and seeing that he has tea or something, and telling him that I'm engaged? Don't for worlds tell him I'm seedy, or else it will get to Silverhampton's ears, and frighten my poor boy out of his wits. Let him think I'm having a music-lesson or interviewing the housekeeper, or having a gown tried on."

"Very well, I will make it all right," said Elfrida, "if only you will go and lie down. At present you look like a sheet,

and it would never do for Lord Silverhampton to come home and find such a wreck of a wife as this. How is he coming?"

"The dog-cart is to be sent over to Johnson's farm for him, and he will meet it. He is walking there from the common, so he must be all right, mustn't he?"

"Of course he is, or he couldn't walk some four or five miles," Lord Stonebridge hastened to assure her: "I couldn't trudge so far, even without an accident, on such a hot afternoon as this."

So Lady Silverhampton retired from the scene of action for awhile; and shortly afterwards Philip Cartwright arrived from the station, and was duly conducted into the garden and sustained with tea. He was full of the new life on which he was entering; and so completely succeeded in carrying away his hearers by his own enthusiasm, that, for the moment, he almost persuaded them to become missionaries too. But not quite.

While they were still sitting talking on the lawn, they heard a dog-cart coming up the avenue; and simultaneously a plump little figure flew out of the garden-door and down the steps leading from the terrace.

"How do you all do?" shouted Lord Silverhampton, jumping out of the cart, and coming forward to meet his guests.

But the plump little figure intervened. "My dear old boy, what have you been doing with yourself? Are you quite certain that you are not hurt?"

"Why, you don't mean to say you have been worrying about me, Evie?" said his lordship, forgetting all about his visitors when he saw his wife's pale face. "I'm as right as a trivet—not even a bruise to speak of."

"You are quite sure you are not deceiving me?"

"Good heavens! no. Think of me deceiving you! Why, I couldn't do it if I tried, you're so confoundedly sharp, you

## A Double Thread

know. But it's all that fool of a groom's fault. I particularly told him not to let her ladyship know a word about the accident, and he has blabbed it out already and worried you to death. I'll send him about his business to-morrow, I'm hanged if I won't, confound his stupid tongue!"

"It wasn't his fault a bit. I saw him coming up the avenue and ran to meet him. And you really are all right?"

"Of course I am, old girl—haven't got a scratch; so don't you worry any more. And I say, you must let me go and speak to all those people you've got here. They'll wonder what's up."

But the people did not wonder; they knew her ladyship better than she thought they did, and the majority of them had seen her face when the groom came up the avenue.

Lady Silverhampton was specially brilliant at dinner that night, and talked incessant nonsense from the soup to the savoury. Elfrida thought she had never known her appear so frivolous or so heartless. "Nevertheless she does keep toys in her provision-shop," Elfrida said to herself, "though she is generally too clever to put them in the window."

"Do you know," said the hostess to Mr. Cartwright in the drawing-room after dinner, "that these two dear young people are going to marry for love? Isn't it queer and original of them? In fact, I really don't know which is the queerest, to marry for love or to go out as a missionary. I feel as if I was conducting a wild beast show when I see all you strange specimens collected under my hospitable roof; I do indeed."

"I am very glad that they have made it up," replied the rector, lowering his voice; "though at one time I was sorely afraid that they would not. They are so exactly made

for one another, that it seemed a shame for any misunderstanding to come between them."

"Still Elfrida played a dangerous game; some men would never have forgiven her, even if she had gone down on her knees to them for a thousand years."

"I really cannot see that she was so much to blame. It was an error of judgment, perhaps, on her part to try such an experiment on a simple, straightforward nature like Le Mesurier's; she might have found some other way of testing his attachment; but I do not see that she was guilty of any crime. You must take into consideration the fact that she had been so much run after for her money, that she found it difficult—in fact, almost impossible—to believe in disinterested affection without some conclusive proof."

"My dear Mr. Cartwright, did you ever meet a man yet who would forgive his guests if they insisted on analysing his wine before they ventured to drink it? And men think as much of their hearts as they do of their cellars."

"I agree with you that Miss Harland made a mistake; but I repeat that a mistake is not a crime."

"Elfrida," cried Lady Silverhampton, rising from her chair and going across the room to where the lovers were sitting together in an alcove, "Mr. Cartwright and I have been talking about you and singing songs of joy because you and Jack have made it up with each other. I think it is lovely to quarrel and make it up with people you really like! It is like putting a bit of bread into champagne to make it fizzy again. If I had my way, I should keep putting bits of bread into my champagne at a party, till I turned it into a regular poultice; and I should quarrel with Silverhampton every morning, and make it up every afternoon. But somehow I never do get my own way, so my champagne and my husband alike remain flat and stale."

"Jack and I are going to begin all over again, and not make any of the mistakes we made before. It is like a game at Halma when the board has been upset: we are not going to try to put the pieces back in their places, but we are going to begin a fresh game altogether."

"Oh, how lovely! I wish Silverhampton and I could begin a fresh game, it would be such fun! Don't you think we might? You see, I might mend his stockings for him and call him 'my dear,' and listen when he was talking; and he might knock me down and trample upon me every time I spoke. I'll suggest it to him; it would make such a nice change, and I do adore change and variety."

"Joking apart, it is really rather nice to make a fresh start sometimes," said Elfrida.

"Yes, you are right," agreed the rector, who had joined the group; "new surroundings—or fresh ways of looking at old ones—give one the chance of putting on new virtues and of throwing off old faults."

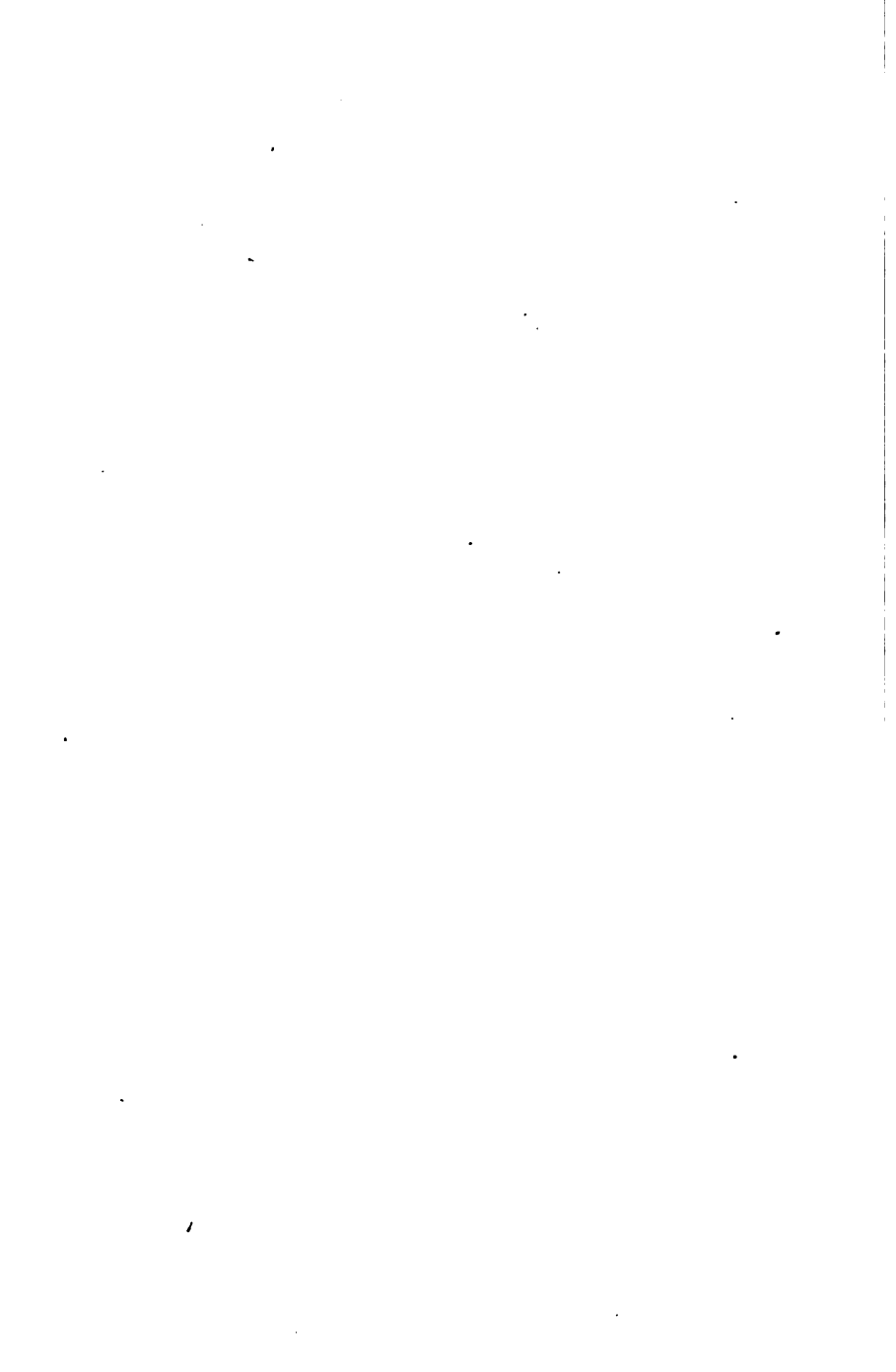
Elfrida sighed. "It must be awful to be too old to make a fresh start."

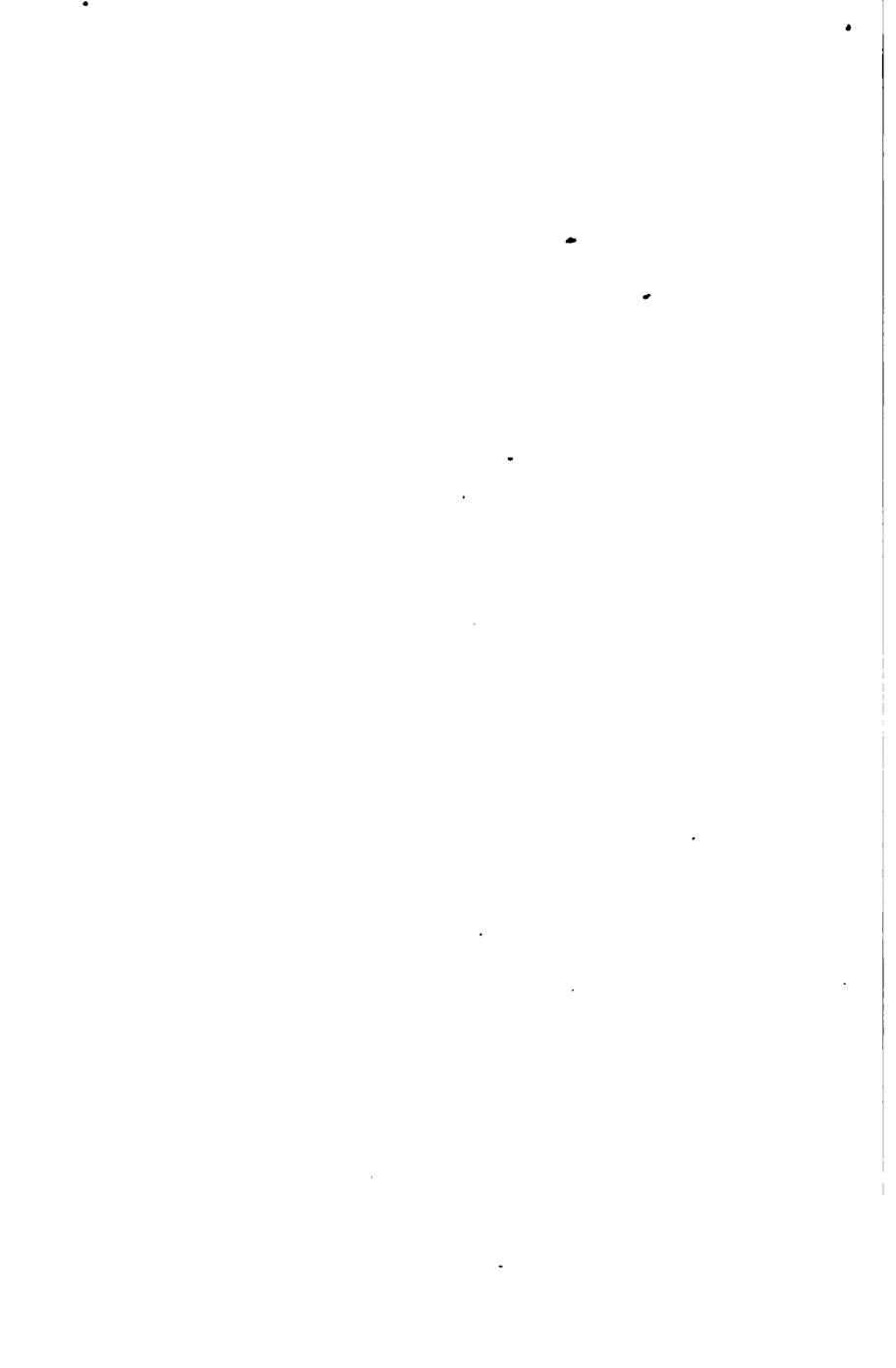
"No one is too old for that," Jack corrected her; "until the day of one's death there is always the chance of beginning life over again."

"And even a better chance the day afterwards," added Philip Cartwright.

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THE END.





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